2013

Alternative Breaks: The impact of student-to-student connections in non-classroom service-learning experiences

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**Alternative Breaks: The impact of student-to-student connections in non-classroom
service-learning experiences**

Zac D. Johnson

**Dissertation submitted to the Department of Communication Studies in the Eberly
College of Arts and Sciences at West Virginia University**

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2013

**Keywords: Communication Studies; Instructional Communication; Alternative
Breaks; Service Learning; Immersion; Connectedness; Integration; Socialization;
Collegiate Experience**

ABSTRACT

Alternative Breaks: The impact of student-to-student connections in non-classroom service-learning experiences

Zac D. Johnson

Alternative breaks represent a new tradition in collegiate service learning (Campus Connect, 2011), wherein students forego traditional break activities (e.g., vacations) to participate in community service with their peers through university sponsored programs. Despite their growing popularity these programs are understudied. Research that has examined alternative breaks has arrived at claims based on anecdotal data (e.g., DuPre, 2010; Noll, 2012). This dissertation investigated two claims found in alternative break literature: students forge connections (e.g., DuPre, 2010, McElhaney, 1998) and alternative break experiences have a long reaching impact on students (e.g., Barclay, 2010; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012). This was accomplished through two studies. In order to extend instructional communication scholarship on student-to-student connectedness, Study One examined the relationship of connectedness to other similar outcomes such as organizational assimilation, small group socialization, and social integration. Study Two examined the long term impact of alternative break participation by questioning alumni regarding their experience with these programs. Quantitative methods were used to collect data from those completing an alternative break experience and alumni who completed an alternative break when enrolled in college. Alumni also provided qualitative data. Study One revealed that connectedness is positively related to the familiarity with peers, recognition, involvement, and role negotiation dimensions of organizational assimilation, small group socialization, and social integration among peers. Study Two discovered that connections are formed among participants and these

connections do persist even upon graduation. Further, participation in alternative breaks has long-term effects beyond relationships. Relationships formed on alternative break could have far reaching impact affecting success and persistence (Tinto, 1993). Taken together these findings indicate that alternative break experiences are a unique opportunity for an institutional program to make substantive contributions to the experience and development of students.

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Acknowledgements

I have waited a long time to write this page. To me, this page, and the idea of this page, represents the culmination of the Ph.D. With that being said I have a lot of people I would like to thank, and since this isn't the Grammys and I don't have a time limit I am going to do my best to get everyone in.

First and foremost, I want to say that my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ made this possible in more ways than I can fathom. Without his guiding hand, loving heart, and perfect mercy I would never have completed this endeavor.

To my family: Mom and Dad you deserve something more than a few lines in a book can provide. You are, simply put, the most selfless individuals I have ever known. You are tremendous and have set a standard in my life for how to live, treat others, and find the good in everything. I could fill volumes with all that you've given me, but most importantly you always supported me and encouraged me to "go confidently in the direction of my dreams," for that and everything else, I'm more grateful than you'll ever know. Josh, my brother, you're a pretty rad dude. When I was at my lows in this journey you were always there to talk to me about something, anything to get my mind off my troubles. If I could pick my sibling, know that I would choose you every single time. For their support along the way my extended family warrants mention as well. Thank you for always understanding and supporting me.

To my advisor Dr. Martin: I appreciate with utmost sincerity all that you've done for me over the past three years. The opportunities, the feedback, the council, and the friendship have all been tremendous. You've been an amazing guide throughout this process and your mentorship will not soon be forgotten. Thanks for everything.

To my committee: Dr. Weber(K), when I got to WVU I was unsure what numbers were. Now, I can at least count to 10 and run an ANOVA. Your tutelage, council, and friendship have been outstanding, and I appreciate all that you've done for me. Dr. Weber(A), getting to work with you over the last couple years in so many different capacities has been awesome. You're an amazingly gifted instructor and I feel privileged to have been able to work with you. Dr. Myers, thanks for pushing me so hard in... well pretty much everything. I am a better scholar and teacher because of you. Dr. Lefebvre, your willingness to provide insightful feedback and a fresh perspective was always much appreciated, and I'm glad we had the chance to work together.

To the other faculty members at WVU: I want to say thank you for all you've done for me. I have learned so much from all of you and I am truly grateful.

To Renee, Terri, and Joy: Thanks for putting up with me. I know that I broke the copier too often, turned in forms late, and generally created ruckus wherever I went, but you always helped me out, and for that I'm appreciative.

To Kate and Courtney: Without your help I never would have been able to do this dissertation. Your willingness to help me collect data and let me check in with you more times than necessary about the whole process was incredible. You're each wonderful people and I'm thankful for your help. And to Alternative Break teams that started it all when I was at UT – thanks for unknowingly setting me on this path, those times mean more to me than I can describe.

There are several individuals who served as mentors to me from afar and helped me reach this point. They are Margaret Sallee, John Haas, J.J. Brown, Ron Laffitte, Maxine Davis, Anton Reece, Norma Mertz, and Grady Bogue. Each of you taught me

things along the way and played a significant role in getting me to WVU. The role you played early in my journey when giving me guidance, support, encouragement, and insight has proved invaluable to me, and I am forever in your debt.

My friends are the most amazing group of hooligans on planet Earth. They're unwavering support and love have always meant the world to me. They've gotten me through the tough times, and celebrated with me in the good times. You're all going to have to deal with not getting your own paragraph (in no particular order):

To those in the greater 865 area code (including but not limited to), Chase, Drew, Jacob, Doug Coffin, Doug Griffey, Niyia, Travis, Glenn, Eric, Ben Altom, Josh B., Caleb B., Blake G., Adam, The Jeffery, Boswell, Ryan L., Nye, Michael McGreevey, Blake P., and Dale, you've all helped me in this journey one way or another and for that I will always be in your debt.

To my fellow Mountaineers (including but not limited too), Jeff Y., Mike C., Nick, Seth, Matthew, Pete, Dirty Dave, Eric, the Blue Moose Crew, and so many others I've met along the way, you each made this town feel more like home and that was crucial in getting me to the finish line. To the songs we've yet to sing and the magic tricks you've yet to see, I simply say thank you and Go Mountaineers!

To those from other areas of the country (mostly Long Island) that have celebrated with me and checked in with me such as Marc, Joe, George, Jason, Bridget, Lee, and Justin, our sporadic contact does not diminish how much I think of you all. Thankfully we all decided that playing a ska band was a good idea at one point in our lives.

To my colleagues in 113 thank you for always providing council, feedback, and laughter. You're amazing people in your own right and I feel honored to have shared space with you for three years. Team Ghost rider (aka: CJ, Michael, and Zac), Jessalyn, Lori, Kelly, Colleen, and those yet to come and those that came before I thank you for everything.

Sara, you comforted me when I was down, celebrated with me when I was on top, and loved me throughout despite all of my faults (and my beard). You're truly a blessing. I am constantly amazed at how lucky I am to have you in my life today and for all the tomorrows to come. Thank you for always being there, pushing me, teaching me, encouraging me, and loving me along the way.

Finally, to the graduate students who will take this tome and condense it into a sentence or two in their own dissertation, I say this, "Stay strong, it's worth it in the end." Also, alternative breaks are good; that's the whole of this thing wrapped up into one thought. You're welcome.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Instructional communication scholarship has rarely concerned itself with student-to-student communication (Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001). Further, instructional communication scholarship has seldom examined student experiences outside the college classroom in spite of claims that students report tremendous growth and learning in non-classroom settings (e.g., Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additionally, instructional communication scholarship centering on service-learning has been scant. Alternative breaks, a distinct service-learning opportunity, represent a unique area of scholarship regarding student-to-student communication, as these trips are orchestrated and planned primarily by students, and occur as extra-, not co-curricular activities (i.e., course credit is not received for participation). Additionally, despite their increasing popularity on college campuses (Bowen, 2011; Campus Compact, 2011) scholarship regarding these programs remains limited. Thus, the current study sought to examine these processes through a communicative lens in order fill gaps in the existing literature. The employment of a communicative lens allows scholars to arrive at a more precise understanding of the impact that alternative break participation can have on students.

Alternative break scholarship has produced only minimal knowledge claims, many of which are derived from qualitative and even anecdotal data. Therefore, scholars must quantitatively explore these experiences in order to reach more generalizable knowledge claims. Thus, the current investigation sought to fill several literature gaps. First, the current effort endeavored to validate claims made by qualitative research which suggest that students create meaningful connections through participation in alternative break (e.g., Noll, 2012). Second, the current studies explored the impact of connection

with other participants on a variety of communicative outcomes (e.g., organizational assimilation, group socialization, and social integration). Third, the current studies attempted to derive a more accurate depiction of the long term effects of alternative break participation. Finally, these studies have furthered instructional communication scholarship into the area of student-to-student communication by examining these processes in non-classroom settings.

To begin a review of relevant literature is presented. This review explores scholarship related to alternative breaks, connectedness, organizational assimilation, group socialization, and social integration. Further, this review defines alternative breaks, as these programs have been ill-defined in current scholarship. Moving forward a rationale of the two studies and their accompanying hypothesis and research questions is forwarded. Next, a methods section is presented followed by results. Finally, this dissertation concludes with a discussion of the findings and how they might be applied to research and practice in higher education.

Alternative Breaks

Alternative break experiences are a new tradition in campus life (Bowen, 2011; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Campus Compact, 2011). These experiences afford students an opportunity to reap a multitude of developmental and experiential benefits (Barclay, 2010; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012). These benefits are similar to study abroad programs with the added benefit being that participation in alternative breaks comes at a much lower time and cost investment (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, & Niehaus, 2012; Plante, Lackey, & Hwang, 2009). While alternative break experiences are becoming increasingly popular on college campuses, empirical investigations into

these programs remain scant in scholarly literature. Indeed, much of the research resides in unpublished dissertations and theses (e.g., Barclay, 2010; Boswell, 2010; Hui, 2009; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012). Further, there is lack of consensus on what constitutes an alternative break with some asserting that any form of short-term immersion, even those linked to classes, should fall under this term (e.g., King, 2004), while others argue that these experiences should be extra-curricular (Noll, 2012). The next section explores the defining characteristics of an alternative break experience.

Defining Characteristics of Alternative Break Experiences

Break Away serves as a national organization for students and professionals working with alternative breaks and is recognized as the starting point for the alternative break movement in higher education (Barclay, 2010; Hui, 2009; Garbuio, 1999). This organization defines an alternative break as an opportunity for students to engage in service while on break from school. These trips are typically geared toward working with a particular social issue (e.g., poverty, homelessness, education reform). In discussing alternative spring breaks Noll (2012) made the following claim, “An ASB program provides students with a spring break experience that allows students to use their spring break as a time to collaborate and serve others,” (p. 12). This notion of committing to service instead of typical spring, summer, fall, or winter break activities is an excellent framework from which to build a more precise definition. A review of the scholarship concerned with alternative break experiences reveal other key characteristics that should be in place to distinguish an alternative break from a class required service component or other similar programs.

Another key characteristic of alternative break experiences is that these trips are planned and executed by students leaders for student participants (McElhaney, 1998). Rhoades and Neurer (1998) asserted that the characteristic of alternative breaks being led by students is important. Kendall and associates (1990) described several programs that focus on spring break service opportunities which are led by students. With students leading and planning these trips, a different dynamic is brought to fruition for student participants than if the trip were led by a non-peer (e.g., faculty or staff). Peer led trips potentially provide students with an opportunity to connect with the experience on a more meaningful level than if the trip was orchestrated by a faculty or staff member. Importantly, the meaning students make regarding these trips often cause dissonance when returning to their home-lives and it is the connections forged with other students that ease the transition back to normalcy (Jones et al., 2012).

Indeed, others have discussed the importance of the group dynamic in the alternative break experience (Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005). In Noll's (2012) description of alternative breaks, she noted the importance of collaboration to the experience. Some have asserted that lasting connections among participants are a welcome product of these experiences (Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010). The nature of the group experience helps to distinguish alternative break experiences from similar immersion programs (i.e., long and short term study abroad) as well as individual volunteering or other service-learning opportunities. The by-students, for-students aspect of alternative break experience coupled with the overall group process brings to light another distinguishing aspect of alternative break experiences: these trips should be extra-curricular in nature rather than co-curricular.

A substantial body of literature exists to support the importance of service learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999). Service learning has been described simply as the act of combining service and learning (e.g., Honnet & Paulsen 1989; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). Novak, Markey, and Allen (2007) forwarded that service learning generally entails “the mastery of academic concepts and content... and contributions to the social good of the individual and the community” (p. 150). While service learning typically conjures images of service occurring in conjunction with a course, Eyler and Giles (1999) noted that “any program that attempts to link academic study with service can be characterized as service-learning; non-course-based programs that include a reflective component and learning goals may also be included under this broad umbrella” (p. 5).

Working from the Eyler and Giles (1999) notion that non-course-based programs can be considered service learning, alternative break experiences can be considered a form of service learning even when not connected to a course component. Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) discovered that course-based service learning differs significantly from generic community service in terms of cognitive outcomes, with course based service leading students to higher gains. Though many courses include short-term immersion experiences as a component for course completion, the findings of Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004), among others (e.g., Barclay, 2010; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012), reveal that the experience of students in course based short-term immersion differs from the experience of students in non-course-based-short-term immersion trips. Thus the current investigation submits that these programs should be treated as distinct programs. Further, Boyle-Baise and Langford argued that non-course-based-short term immersion experiences (e.g., alternative breaks) likely attract different students than course-based

programs. Given this, the current study agrees with the statement that a distinguishing characteristic of alternative break experiences is that they exist in a co-curricular programmatic space, rather than in conjunction with a course.

Definitions of alternative break experiences typically stress the importance of immersion (Garbuio, 1999; Hui, 2009; Jones et al., 2012). The immersion of participants in a different environment is important to the gains associated with these programs, as it allows students to fully engage with the service and reflective activities. Hui argued that immersion distinguishes alternative breaks from other forms of service learning. Simply put, immersion, or the ability to experience a new culture while simultaneously learning about social issues and the participant's own ability to impact those issues, leads to increased gains. Immersion helps to distinguish alternative break experiences from other types of service because students are removed from their comfort zone (Garbuio, 1999; Jones et al., 2012). Removing students from the familiar allows them to more fully involve themselves with the experience, their peers, the communities they serve, and the service activities.

An important characteristic of alternative break experiences that helps to separate them from simply volunteering while on spring break with a group of students is that of reflection. As previously noted by Eyler and Giles (1999), reflection is the differentiating component between volunteering and service learning. It is the process of debriefing and discussing the experiences encountered on a service trip that allows students to reap the proposed learning benefits of experience. Scholars have identified the importance of quality reflection in achieving learning outcomes while on alternative break experiences (Garbuio, 1999; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005; McElhaney, 1998). A critical

examination of their experience (i.e., reflection) leads students to many of the gains that are associated with service learning (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Eyler & Giles, 1994). Notably, Boswell (2010) found that when reflection is mechanical, unguided, and forced students are apt to resist; Boswell concluded by suggesting that in order to maximize the process of reflection students should be instructed regarding the benefits and reasons for reflection prior to the outset of the trip. Given these ideas it is critical for alternative break experiences to include a reflective component in order to achieve learning outcomes (Ash et al., 2005; Eyler & Giles, 1994; McElhaney, 1998) and to distinguish alternative break experiences from simply volunteering on spring break with a group of peers.

In sum, the current investigation defines alternative break experiences in this way: alternative break experiences occur when students willfully choose (e.g., extra-curricular) to eschew typical break activities (e.g., vacation, return home) in order to perform service with a group of peers under the guidance of other students in a community removed from their own (i.e., immersion). By defining alternative break experiences as such a clear distinction is made from course based service learning, course-based-short-term immersion programs, and volunteering. This is an important distinction to make as findings have found differing outcomes can be attributed to course and non-course based programs (McElhaney, 1998; Plante et al., 2009).

Findings on Alternative Break Experiences

While investigations into alternative break experiences have been limited, an exhaustive literature review reveals some themes regarding knowledge about these programs. The limited amount of research into these experiences reveals that there are a

variety of positive gains associated with developmental outcomes associated with alternative break experiences. These findings comprise the bulk of the research cannon. However, after conducting a critical reading of the published material on alternative breaks, a theme of student-to-student connectedness appears.

Developmental.

On the broadest level it is easy to say that students develop personally as a result of participation in alternative break experiences. Hui (2009) cited the immersive nature of alternative break as being crucial in allowing students to grow personally in ways that typical service-learning and volunteerism do not. Participants in alternative break experiences gain a more thorough understanding of themselves, others, and community through the experience (Rhoades & Neurer, 1998). These findings are echoed and expounded upon in various sources throughout the literature.

The concept of students learning about themselves has been discussed repeatedly in the literature. Alternative break participants reportedly experience the process of meaning making (i.e., personal growth) by allowing their pre-existing identities to interact with other participants and the service experienced on the trip (Hui, 2009; Jones et al., 2012). When discussing student development it is necessary to examine growth in regards to the seven development vectors forwarded by Chickering (1969) which have reached near paradigmatic status in the literature. ABE participants display gains in all of Chickering's (1969) seven vectors: developing competence, developing mature relationships, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing integrity, developing purpose, establishing identity, managing emotions (Barclay, 2010). McElhaney (1998) discovered that students make personal gains in both affective and

cognitive ways. Some of the affective outcomes described gains related to personality, values, and self-concept (Astin, 1993). Affective gains reaped from alternative break experiences include: understanding other perspectives, changing perceptions regarding issues, challenging to existing beliefs and values, and increasing self-awareness (McElhaney, 1998). The concept of personal development includes the ability to grow in leadership capabilities (Noll, 2012). Overall, it appears that alternative break experience participants make positive gains related to their personal development.

Given that alternative break experiences are based upon a service component it stands to reason that these programs lead to gains related to citizenship and service. At the broadest level alternative break experiences lead to increased understanding of issues examined through service on the trip (Garbuio, 1999; Jones et al., 2012; McElhaney, 1998). In line with findings related to other service experiences, alternative break experience participants report new perceptions of service recipients (Bowen, 2011; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005) including increased levels of compassion and empathy (Plante et al., 2009). Alternative break experiences can also affect student perceptions of social justice, civic engagement, cultural sensitivity, and citizenship (Bowen, 2011; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Garbuio, 1999). Overall, it is clear that students develop personally from alternative break experiences. This personal development includes intrinsic components (e.g., managing emotions) and extrinsic components (e.g., civic engagement).

Student-to-Student Connections.

Within the literature reports of connections formed among students on alternative breaks abound (e.g., Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010; Hui, 2009; Jones et al., 1998). Indeed,

Barclay (2010) noted that students who participate in alternative breaks report gains in the development of mature interpersonal relationships. Non-curriculum based experiences have been linked to more gains in social outcomes (e.g., connections) than curriculum based experiences (McElhaney, 1998). Bohon (2007) and DuPre (2010) each reported that they witnessed students form lasting connections that endured upon returning to campus. These lasting connections have been cited as crucial in helping students to reintegrate into their everyday lives once returning to campus (Jones et al., 2012).

Though these connections appear to form, alternative break participants cite meeting people as an added benefit, not a determining motivation (Boswell, 2010). Boswell asserted that during alternative break experiences groups congeal despite poor and problematic leadership. While connections often form between participants, it should not be taken as a given benefit or outcome of their experiences with alternative breaks. Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) reported that students taking part in a course based short-term immersion likely form racialized cliques based on non-inclusive and voluntary activities (e.g., lodging). These scholars concluded that it is important for students to self-select into participation, as students who are there against their choice are likely to segment themselves from others or feel trapped, and as such these students engage with the experience at lower levels than self-selected students.

Connections among peers have been forwarded as a significant factor in student success and matriculation (Tinto, 1993). It appears that the experience of alternative break affords students the opportunity to make meaningful connections among themselves. However, the findings from the aforementioned alternative break studies are

all qualitative in nature. Thus the findings of connections among students are subject to researcher interpretation and while these studies appear to be methodologically sound, scholars should investigate these claims of connections quantitatively to confirm and extend these previous findings. The simple absence of quantitative research on this area is not cause for further research. However, research which generates more generalizable findings could greatly benefit scholars, practitioners and students alike.

Student-Community Connections.

Connections formed on alternative breaks reach beyond student-to-student encounters. Indeed, several scholars report that alternative break experiences result in participants feeling more connected to their communities both on the trip and at home (Bowen, 2011; Rhoads & Neurer, 1998). Community partners have reported that they would welcome future alternative break participants to serve in their establishments should the opportunity arise (King, 2004). Thus it is easy to see that the benefits of alternative break are transactional. Students are challenged while simultaneously receiving fulfillment and enjoyment (Noll, 2012); community partners receive individuals willing to serve and contribute thoughtfully to the mission of their particular organization (King, 2004).

Conclusion

In this section, the concept of alternative breaks has been distinguished from other similar programs (e.g., short-term immersion, course-based service-learning, volunteerism). I defined alternative breaks as experiences that occur when students willfully choose (extra not co-curricular) to eschew typically break activities (e.g., vacation, return home) in order to perform service with a group of peers under the

guidance of peers in a community removed from their own (i.e., immersion). A review of scholarship on alternative break experiences allows for the following conclusions: (1) Alternative break experiences allow students to grow and develop intrapersonally, (2) Alternative break experiences benefit students by allowing them to make gains in several citizenship outcomes, (3) Alternative break experiences provide students with the opportunity to build connections among themselves, and (4) Alternative break experiences afford students an avenue through which to build connections with communities. At the same time more research is needed to fully understand the concept of student-to-student connections that are forged on alternative break experiences and the long reaching impact of these experiences on students.

Connectedness

Instructional communication research has long concerned itself with the interactions of teachers and students (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006; Myers, 2010). As a result, a wealth of knowledge has been produced concerning these relationships and how they affect processes such as learning (Andersen, 1979; Myers, 2010; Richmond et al., 1987), motivation (Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990), success (McKay & Estrella, 2008; Rubin & Graham, 1988), and persistence (Wheless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrod, 2011). Further, instructional communication research has occurred primarily in the collegiate classroom (Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001). However, instructional communication need not limit itself to teacher-student relationships or the collegiate classroom as the discipline of instructional communication is concerned with how communication affects various educational outcomes in a variety of settings (e.g., Kearney, 2008). Though these foci have produced valuable knowledge, Waldeck et al.

(2001) argued that instructional communication needs to grow in a variety of ways in order to remain relevant. One way these scholars forward instructional communication should grow is through the examination of student-to-student interactions.

Defining Connectedness

Dwyer et al. (2004) defined classroom connectedness as “student-to-student perceptions of a supportive and cooperative communication environment in the classroom. A connected classroom climate reflects a strong within-group bond that frees students to express themselves in communication with others” (p. 267). This means that when students interact with one another and form meaningful relationships, they feel more capable of expressing themselves within these groups. The concept of connectedness is distinct from similar concepts such as classroom climate (Myers, 1995), belongingness (Lee & Robbins, 1995), social support (McGrath, Gutierrez, & Valadez, 2000), and classroom community (Schaps, Lewis, & Watson, 1997).

Connectedness differs from climate in that the creation of climate rests within the perceptions and needs of both the instructor and student (Darling & Civikly, 1987; Hearn & Moos, 1978; Tricket & Moos, 1974). Myers and Claus (2012) asserted that connectedness as conceptualized by Dwyer et al. (2004) is a way in which classroom climate can be studied. Roles undertaken in the classroom and personality of individual students have also been conceptualized as factors of classroom climate (Walberg & Anderson, 1968). The concept of mutual interaction and involvement is what distinguishes many conceptualizations of classroom climate from classroom connectedness. Further, Myers (1995) declared that classroom climate could be a result of “how well teachers establish an environment in which mutual interaction is valued,

encouraged, or supported,” (p.193). However, Ifert-Johnson (2009), citing the assertion of Myers (1995) that for students climate may be reflected in the need to be validated by peers, noted that student-to-student communication is part of some conceptualizations of classroom climate despite research being almost exclusively centered on the teacher’s role in climate. Ifert-Johnson (2009) concluded that such conceptualizations help to add content validity to the conceptualization of connectedness forwarded by Dwyer et al. (2004). In sum, it is possible for students to perceive little or no connection to their instructor but still perceive a high level of connectedness among themselves; the centrality of student-to-student communication in the construct of connectedness is what distinguishes connectedness from classroom climate.

While concepts like belongingness and social support appear to be indistinguishable from connectedness, a review of the literature reveals these are indeed distinct terms. Indeed, Dwyer et al. (2004) claimed that belongingness as conceptualized by Lee and Robbins (1995) deals with a global sense of connection and affiliation rather than on the specific context of the classroom. Belongingness is a disposition while connectedness is a product of specific behaviors. Social support references communication that helps interactants reduce uncertainty in order to enhance an individual’s perception of control (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). These constructs could impact students’ perception of connectedness (Dwyer et al., 2004), but are clearly distinct.

Classroom connectedness differs from classroom community (Schaps et al., 1997) in several ways. Classroom community however focuses on several aspects of the classroom that contribute to a feeling of community and camaraderie among students and

teachers. Schaps et al. described two dimensions of classroom community: (1) classroom supportiveness, which is characterized by student perceptions of peer treatment, and (2) autonomy and influence in the classroom, or how students are incorporated into decision making processes within the classroom. While the dimension of classroom supportiveness appears quite similar to classroom connectedness a noticeable difference can be found when comparing the two in that the primary concern of connectedness is with student-to-student communication and the role that communication plays in establishing a positive atmosphere. Again the focus on student-to-student communication distinguishes connectedness from classroom community.

Connectedness in Non-Classroom Settings

While connectedness as conceptualized and operationalized by Dwyer et al. (2004) explicitly applies to the classroom, the construct could be reconceptualized and applied to a variety of other instructional settings. Indeed, given the focus of student-to-student communication in the construct of connectedness any instance wherein students interact could provide an example of connectedness. As many students engage in extra-curricular activities and cite these as their most important experiences while at college (Kuh, 1995) the concept of connectedness should be applied to programs and activities such as alternative breaks. Further, Tinto (1993) asserted that students who successfully connect with their peers are more likely to experience quality gains related to college than those who do not. While some scholars have asserted that many students should remain connected to their home communities, the idea that students who connect with their collegiate peers are more likely to be reap the benefits of college is irrefutable (Tinto, 1997; 2006). Indeed, Pascarella's general model for assessing change forwards that

interactions with peers is a critical factor in learning and cognitive development. Astin (1970) also described social environments and connections as an important element in student gains associated with college. By examining the concept of connectedness within non-classroom settings scholars can gain a more accurate and holistic picture of how students connect with one another across their collegiate experience.

Research Findings Involving Student-to-Student Connectedness

Although a relatively new construct connectedness has recently received increased attention in the literature. However, more research is still needed to fully understand the idea of student-to-student connections. Connectedness has been examined in relation to learning (Ifert-Johnson, 2009), student participation (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010), and various instructor behaviors (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012).

Learning and Student-to-Student Connectedness.

The role of connectedness in learning is arguably the most important relationship, as the goal of any educational endeavor classroom or otherwise should be to positively impact learning. Connections that students forge with one another have been described as being crucial to successful and satisfying collegiate experiences (Tinto, 1993). Student-to-student connectedness is positively related to affective learning (Ifert-Johnson, 2009). Affective learning is also a moderating construct between the relationship of various instructor behaviors and cognitive learning (Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996). However, while connectedness has been positively related to affect for content, course, behaviors advocated by the course, and intent to take similar courses (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ifert-Johnson, 2009), connectedness is not significantly related to affect toward the

instructor (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ifert-Johnson, 2009). Given the focus of connectedness on student-to-student communication rather than the behaviors of the professor, this lack of a relationship is logical. Cognitive learning is also positively related with connectedness (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Prisbell, Dwyer, Carlson, Bingham, & Cruz, 2009). Overall, when students feel connected to their peers they report higher levels of learning.

Participation and Student-to-Student Connectedness.

Another student outcome that has been investigated in relation to connectedness is participation. In-class participation encompasses the information seeking strategies students use and the extent to which students are involved in classroom communication (Fassinger, 1995; Myers, Edwards, Wahl, & Martin, 2007). Indeed, connected students report higher levels of participation (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) offered more explanation of the relationship between connectedness and participation, citing that connectedness mediates the relationship of instructor confirmation and student involvement both inside and outside of the classroom. Finally, Myers and Claus (2012) found that connectedness is a significant predictor of the participatory communication motive, meaning that students who are connected are more motivated to communicate with instructors in order to participate, rather than to simply gain information. In sum, students who feel connected are more likely to communicate with instructors for participatory reasons (Myers & Claus, 2012) both inside (Frisby & Martin, 2010) and outside the classroom (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010).

Instructor Contributions to Student-to-Student Connectedness.

Despite the focus of connectedness on student-to-student communication in building a supportive environment (Dwyer et al., 2004) a wealth of research has examined the role of various teacher behaviors in affecting this construct. Nonverbal immediacy and confirmation are both positively related to student perceptions of connectedness (Ifert-Johnson, 2009; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Further, as teachers misbehave it is likely that students will feel less connected to their classmates (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2011). If instructors build positive rapport within their classrooms, students are likely to report higher levels of connectedness (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Sidelinger et al. (2012) found when instructors display a willingness to comply with students requests a higher level of connectedness is reported by participants. Finally, when instructors engage in familiar and informal communication with their classes (i.e., positive slang) a higher degree of connectedness is also reported (Mazer & Hunt, 2008).

Conclusion

In sum, the construct of classroom connectedness offers a unique perspective through which to examine educational climates (Myers & Claus, 2012). The focus of connectedness on student-to-student communication as a result of both student behaviors and instructor behaviors helps to distinguish it from other like constructs (Dwyer et al., 2004; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ifert-Johnson, 2009). Given that both classroom and non-classroom experiences have been acknowledged as important in a student's educational experience (Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), connectedness provides researchers a lens through which to examine student relationships in both contexts.

Finally, connectedness offers a framework through which scholars can examine the process of integration, socialization, and assimilation, as students who build meaningful and supportive connections with peers are likely to report higher levels across these constructs.

Organizational Assimilation

The construct of organizational assimilation describes the process individuals undergo when they become part of an organization (Jablin, 1982). Assimilation has been employed in organizational research for decades and boasts a robust theoretical grounding and extensive literature base (Jablin, 1982; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Scholars have utilized assimilation when investigating a variety of organizations including fire departments (Myers, 2005), hospitality organizations (Hart & Miller, 2005), volunteer organizations (Kramer, 2011), seasonal employees (Blevins, 2007), and most germane for the current study, institutions of higher education (Dixon, 2012; Myers, 1994; Myers, 1998; Zorn & Gregory, 2005). Despite the variety of contexts in which assimilation has been examined, little is known about how undergraduate students assimilate into universities. More specifically, knowledge is scant regarding the relationship between assimilation and connectedness in non-classroom settings.

Gaining and maintaining membership in an organization can be an anxiety producing process (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck, Siebold, & Flanagan, 2004). Perhaps nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the case of universities. College students exist in a space where they must become their own individuals while simultaneously working toward assimilating, socializing, and integrating into an environment which is often completely new (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Indeed, a considerable amount of work

has focused on the process of integrating into the culture of a new institution (Tinto, 1993). Further, leading theoretical models of college persistence assert that students must assimilate not only socially, but academically, in order to succeed (Tinto). These processes can occur through a variety of mechanisms such as campus activities, on-campus employment, interactions with faculty/instructors, and service-learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Given that the assimilation and integration processes have been conceptualized as ongoing (Jablin, 1982; 2001; Waldeck et al., 2004) the concept of assimilation provides an excellent lens through which to examine the collegiate experience.

This section will begin by defining the construct of organizational assimilation and continue on to explore the theoretical foundations discussed by Jablin (1982). Next, the quantitative dimensions of assimilation forwarded by Myers and Oetzel (2003) and Gailliard, Myers, and Seibold (2010) will be examined with a discussion of how these dimensions might occur in the collegiate experience. Finally, this section will conclude with a review of research salient to the current investigation.

Defining Organizational Assimilation

Jablin (1982) defined organizational assimilation as “the process by which organizational members become part of, or are absorbed into, the culture of an organization,” (p. 256). Further, assimilation has been described as the process through which individuals enter into, become integrated with, and eventually leave an organization (Jablin, 1987; Jablin & Krone, 1987). In an effort to provide a theoretical framework for organizational assimilation from a communicative perspective Jablin (1982) turned to the work of scholars concerned with socialization (Van Maanen, 1975),

individualization (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975), role-taking (Katz & Kahn, 1966), and role making (Graen, 1976). These foundations have allowed scholars to view assimilation as a wholly participatory and socially constructed process (Waldeck & Myers, 2008), rather than something that is acted out entirely by either the individual or organization.

Distinction Between Assimilation and Socialization.

Though many view the constructs of assimilation and socialization as too similar to distinguish, there are subtle differences which must be addressed in order to gain an accurate definition of assimilation. Indeed, Moreland and Levine (1982) argued that these two constructs are ill-defined and often used interchangeably. Assimilation is defined as the process individuals move through in order to enter into, integrate with, and eventually leave an organization (Jablin, 1987). Socialization is regarded as an ongoing exercise which allows individuals to learn about the values, norms, and communicative behaviors necessary to function and contribute to an organization (Chao et al., 1994; Porter et al., 1975; Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1975). Assimilation is often explicated through various stages of socialization, as individuals must be socialized in order to fully integrate with an organization (Jablin, 1982; Porter et al., 1975; Van Maanen, 1975). For example, in Jablin's (1982) stage model of assimilation, organizational members are said to progress through anticipatory and vocational socialization in order to become assimilated. Jablin (2001) noted that socialization should be classified as the actions put forth by an organization in order to assimilate an individual. In order for an individual to become assimilated into an organization, they must be socialized (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). The distinction between assimilation and

socialization is seen in that socialization, or the ongoing process of learning how to exist within the organization, is a necessary step in organizational assimilation, the process of becoming an integrated part of the organization.

Theoretical Perspectives in Assimilation Scholarship

In his seminal work Jablin (1982) pulled from a variety of fields and perspectives in order to thoroughly explicate the concept of assimilation. Through the work of Jablin and others assimilation has been examined from distinct perspectives: the actions taken by individual organizational members (i.e., individualization), the processes utilized by organizations to assimilate organization members (i.e., socialization), the interactions between organizational members and organizations (i.e., interaction), and contextually based perspectives (i.e., contextual) (Jablin, 1982; Song & Chathoth, 2010). Jablin claimed that most assimilation work has been viewed from the perspective of the organization, though the individual's role should not be ignored, as both perspectives are equally important. The assimilation process has been described as something that cannot be done alone and, as such, successful assimilation requires the participation of various organizational members (Kramer, 2010). Myers and Oetzel (2003) argued that successful assimilation is as much a result of the efforts of an organization as those put forth by individuals. Further, Moreland and Levine (1982) forwarded that the process through which the organization or group applies itself to the individual is known as socialization, while the individual matriculates through assimilation. Overall, the process of assimilation is indeed a thoroughly communicative process, which can be interpreted through the frameworks of the individual, organization, the interactions between these two, and interactions with the environment or context.

Individualization.

Individualization is defined as the process through which employees attempt to influence the organization in order to satisfy their own needs and interpretations of how to best perform the tasks necessitated by his/her role (Porter et al., 1975). This process plays an important role in assimilation and has also been described as role-making, wherein individuals attempt to modify the expectations of their position by communicating with other organizations members (Graen, 1976; Katz & Kahn, 1966). Jablin (1982) asserted that the intensity of individualization is proportional to the intensity of organizational efforts to socialize an individual. Scholars have attempted to fit individualization into various typologies (Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1975). Three types of individualization behaviors are rebellion (e.g., rejection of all organizational values and norms), creative individualism (e.g., acceptance of key values and norms and rejection of those values and norms deemed less important or secondary), and conformity (e.g., acceptance of all values and norms) (Schein, 1968). Van Maanen's (1975) typology, which like Schein's reflects the ways in which employees adapt to the organization, attempts to fit individuals into a given archetype (i.e., teamplayer, isolate, warrior, or outsider). These typologies help to elucidate the individualization perspective, as they place an emphasis on the individual's behaviors in response to the organization. Overall, individualization, or role-making, serves as an important factor that affects an individuals' perception of their assimilation into an organization.

Organizational.

The organizational based perspective is characterized as actions taken by an organization to properly socialize an organizational member (Kramer, 2010). This

process has often been referred to simply as socialization (e.g., Jablin, 2001). Further, this process has been delineated into two separate stages: vocational anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001). This perspective has also been conceptualized as the process through which individuals accept their position in the organization, or, role-taking (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Another key component of this stage is when individuals achieve a level of comfort of acceptance in their role, also known as metamorphosis (Jablin, 1982; Van Maanen, 1975). Overall, the organizational perspective offers insight into how organizations work to affect their employees throughout the on-going participative process of assimilation.

Interactionist Perspective.

When the perspectives of the individual and the organization join together the role taking/making perspective is formed (Jablin, 1982). This position has been utilized repeatedly within the discipline of communication to define assimilation (Jablin, 1982; Kramer & Miller, 1999). The previous perspectives (i.e., individualization, socialization) fall short in explanatory utility, as they are conceptualized as a one-way, rather than transactional, process (Jablin, 1982). Both role-taking (Katz & Kahn, 1966), role-making (Graen, 1976), and socialization (Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1975) processes are of equal importance in the assimilation process (Jablin, 1982). Indeed, without accounting for each of these processes assimilation, as forwarded by Jablin and colleagues (1982, 1987, 2001; Miller & Jablin, 1991), would seem to ignore the communicative, constitutive, on-going, and reciprocal nature of assimilation. As such, it is vital when explicating assimilation to account for actions taken by the individual (e.g., individualization) and the organization (e.g., socialization) in order to create a more clear

and accurate picture of the process of entering into, integrating with, and eventually leaving an organization (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001).

Contextual.

Another perspective on organizational assimilation focuses on the relationship between an organizational member and the environment of the organization (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). This perspective forwards that individuals seek to maintain reciprocal or “corresponding” relationships with their environment (Johnson & Graen, 1973). While this framework offers some insight into the assimilation process it is outcome oriented (Johnson & Graen), models such as the stage model of assimilation forwarded by Jablin (1982) are process orientated. Thus, less predictive utility is found in the work of Lofquist and Dawis (1969) as it only provides researchers with a lens through which to examine the outcomes of assimilation, while the stage model of assimilation offered by Jablin affords researchers the opportunity to examine the process of assimilation, including, but not limited to, outcomes.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives.

It is crucial to note that all of these perspectives, including the overarching category of assimilation, occur through communication (Jablin, 1982). The stage model presented by Jablin (1982) is perhaps the most useful and heuristic framework of assimilation. Based on the simplicity of Jablin’s model scholars have utilized it to incredible ends when seeking to understand organizational assimilation (Kramer, 2010; Kramer & Miller, 1999). Individuals cannot learn the values, norms, and expectations without communicating with other organizational members. Further, they cannot take ownership or negotiate their role within organizations without exchanging messages with

the organization and its constitutive members. Finally, an organizational member's interactions with an institutional environment occur through communication. Therefore, it is clear that organizational assimilation is a uniquely communicative process through which individuals become a member of an organization (Jablin, 1982).

Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation

As discussed, many scholars have explicated perspectives and stages of organization assimilation (e.g., Bullis & Bach, 1989; Chao et al., 1994; Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001; Kramer, 2011). However, the work of Myers and Oetzel (2003), furthered by the efforts of Gailliard et al. (2010), stands as a unique notion in its assertion that the on-going process of assimilation is a multi-dimensional, rather than uni-dimensional, experience. This conceptualization includes seven dimensions of assimilation: acculturation, adaptation/role negotiation, familiarity with peers, familiarity with supervisors, involvement, job competency, and recognition.

Acculturation, as described by Myers and Oetzel (2003), is the process through which individuals learn about and accept an organization's culture. Acculturation is easily exemplified in the life of college students through the orientation processes that many students go through. Many institutions utilize an orientation process to teach students the values, processes, and culture of the school. Within these institutions new students, regardless of status (e.g., first-year traditional aged, transfer, non-traditional, or other), participate in some sort of orientation process in order to learn functional (e.g., how to register) and cultural (e.g., the fight song) aspects of the institution. Clearly, the dimension of acculturation is an aspect of assimilation that occurs within the student experience.

Adaptation/role negotiation occurs when an organizational member achieves a comfortable standing within the organization based on their own expectations and those of the organization (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). While this dimension might not be readily apparent in college student life, it does exist. For example, students enter into college with specific expectations which might not align with those of the institution. More directly, many students enter into college with specific expectations about work load and rigor (Sperber, 2005), which many instructors violate (Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham, 2007). These violations, if not neutralized through processes such as adequate assimilation, could be detrimental to the success of students as it has been well argued that in order to be successful, students must find a way to adapt to their new surroundings, both academically and socially (Tinto, 1993, 2006). Thus, students must adapt and negotiate their role within the academic and social environments at school in order to appropriately assimilate.

Myers and Oetzel (2003) originally forwarded a dimension of organizational assimilation labeled familiarity with others. Later, Gailliard et al. (2010) further delineated this dimension into familiarity with co-workers/peers and familiarity with supervisors. Familiarity with co-workers is described as the degree to which individuals are comfortable, friendly, and knowledgeable about those they work with (Gailliard et al., 2010). Students who have strong relationships with their peers would likely experience a high level of this dimension. Familiarity with supervisors is regarded as the level of comfort, friendliness, and knowledge that organizational members have about their supervisors. Within the student experience supervisors might be conceptualized as faculty, staff, administrators, or other institutional personnel. When students believe that

they have strong relationships with university personnel (e.g., faculty and staff) they would likely report higher degrees of familiarity with supervisors.

Involvement with an organization is exemplified by participation in organizational activities or any attempt to contribute to the organization in some way (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Myers and Oetzel (2003) provided an example of two students in a new environment: one who is excelling, and one is struggling. They noted that the thriving student had involved herself in “many aspects of university life,” while the struggling student had not gotten involved (Myers & Oetzel, 2003, p. 444). Indeed, involvement in the educational process is an important factor in student success (Astin, 1993).

The job competency dimension of organizational assimilation is demonstrated when individuals have the ability to function properly in their role (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). For students this could occur through understanding how to register for classes, navigate campus, access online class portals (e.g., eCampus or Blackboard), or even properly study. One example of job competency might be the act of notetaking, a behavior that students engage in on a daily basis. Research has discovered that students who take notes learn more than students who do not (Titsworth, 2001). The act of notetaking is only one aspect of a student’s role, which must be preformed competently in order to succeed. Clearly, this dimension of assimilation is crucial to a student’s success.

The dimension of recognition is apparent when individuals are “recognized as valuable,” and believe those around them acknowledge their contributions as meaningful (Myers & Oetzel, 2003, p. 444). Students might experience this dimension of

assimilation when an instructor or advisor thanks them for their efforts in class or regarding an activity/program. This dimension could also appear when students are given awards or honors by their department/major or college for high achievement or significant contributions. Another possible example of this dimension in student life could be when a student is approached by a peer because of their expertise in a given area (e.g., math or relationships). Recognition is an important facet of a student's successful assimilation into an institution.

Overall, the dimensional framework of assimilation forwarded by Myers and colleagues (Gailliard et al., 2010; Myers & Oetzel, 2003) offers scholars an avenue through which to examine organizational assimilation. This perspective also allows scholars the ability to further segment the stage model (Jablin, 1982) of assimilation in order to more clearly understand how organizational members enter into, integrate with, and eventually leave an organization (Jablin, 1982, 1987; Jablin & Krone, 1987).

Major Research Areas of Organizational Assimilation

Research concerning organizational assimilation has been quite robust (Davis & Myers, 2012; Jablin, 1982, 2001; Kramer, 2010, 2011; Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Indeed, several distinct areas of research were acknowledged by Waldeck and Myers in their review of assimilation research. Since their review assimilation research has continued to expand and incorporate new ideas and conceptualizations of how assimilation might occur (e.g., Kramer, 2010, 2011). The current study will explore relevant themes within this literature base including antecedents and correlates of assimilation, assimilation through work groups, outcomes

associated with assimilation, assimilation in voluntary organizations, and finally college students and assimilation.

Factors Contributing to Assimilation.

One area of research concerning assimilation is that of factors that contribute to assimilation. A review of assimilation research indicates that much work has focused on correlates of assimilation, such as needs (Jablin, 1987), information-seeking (Miller, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Myers, 1998), and self-regulation (Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks & Ashford, 1997). Personality and contextual factors have also been examined as constructs which affect assimilation (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Song & Chathoth, 2010). Some have argued that precursors to assimilation center on the concept of needs at a variety of levels (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2008).

One factor that has been repeatedly acknowledged as something that contributes to perceptions of assimilation is that of needs (Jablin, 1987; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Waldeck and Myers reviewed scholarship that asserted individual-level needs (e.g., Teboul, 1994), group-level needs (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 1996), and organizational-level needs (e.g., Jablin, 1987) all impact the assimilation process. An example of individual level needs that lead to successful assimilation might be the need to reduce uncertainty (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995). Indeed, Kramer (2010) noted that Jablin's (1982) model of assimilation grew from uncertainty reduction scholarship. The need for a connected climate could be a group-level need as conceptualized by Ashford and Saks (1996). Finally, organizational-level needs could be represented by a need for "stability, coordination, control, power, and conscientious/competent role performance" (Waldeck & Myers, 2008, p. 344). While needs undoubtedly impact the process of assimilation,

there are a variety of other factors that affect assimilation (e.g., Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2006).

Investigations into the role of communication and personality traits have been scant (Tidwell & Sias, 2005). However, more is known about how individual traits affect group socialization processes (e.g., Anderson, Riddle, & Martin, 1999). Despite the limited number of investigations into traits role in the assimilation process some knowledge does exist specifically with regard to information seeking processes (Tidwell & Sias, 2005). Indeed, Miller and Jablin (1991) claimed that individual differences play a significant role in the information seeking process for organizational newcomers. Indeed, this claim has been supported by the findings of Tidwell and Sias (2005) who found significant relationships between personality traits and information seeking behaviors. Information seeking has also been used in conjunction with other organizational assimilation outcomes (e.g., involvement, commitment, and role ambiguity) (Mignerey et al., 1995). These researchers found that assertive individuals are more tolerant of role ambiguity and thus have a less anxiety producing assimilation process, while communication apprehension is not predictive of these outcomes (Mignerey et al., 1995). These relationships between traits and information seeking behaviors suggest that some individuals will have an easier experience with the assimilation process. Other researchers have examined factors such as self-efficacy (Song & Chathoth, 2010) and self-esteem (Teboul, 1994) in the assimilation process concluding that higher levels of efficacy and esteem are related to more positive assimilation experiences. While some have argued that predispositions play only a limited role in the assimilation process (Saks & Ashforth, 2000), the findings of others

(e.g., Migerney et al., 1995; Song & Chathoth, 2010; Teboul, 1994; Tidwell & Sias, 2005) refute such a claim by establishing a variety of communicative and personality traits as significant in the assimilation process. Overall, a variety of concepts have been investigated in relation to organizational assimilation both as antecedents and correlates (Waldeck & Myers, 2008).

Assimilation in Groups and Organizations.

Some have suggested that the majority of organizational socialization occurs through groups (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Moreland & Levine, 2001). Perhaps this is due to the increased salience and relevance of these relationships and behaviors culled from these experiences, rather than actions put forth by the organization at large (Moreland & Levine, 2001). Moreland and Levine (1982) argued that groups are constantly renegotiating their relationships based on the constantly shifting and ever evolving nature of groups. Further, it has been forwarded that workgroups can control what and how individuals learn about an organization (Moreland & Levine, 2001).

The assimilation process that occurs through groups must be examined with specific regard to context, as this process occurs differently based on the type of work, industry, and organization under investigation (Ashforth et al., 2007; Gibson & Papa, 2000; Moreland & Levine, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). For example, firefighters and technology workers might have very different assimilation experiences as a result of their work in groups. Another example is the work of Scott and Myers (2002) who asserted that in order to be an active and participating member of an organization with full status, individuals must learn organizational norms from their work group

interactions (e.g., emotion management). Scholars have also found that across groups there will be differences even within fields (Chen, 2005; Chen & Klimoski, 2003; Myers, 2005; Myers & McPhee, 2006). Thus, it seems clear that academic-course-based groups might affect students' perceptions of assimilation differently than extra-curricular groups (e.g., an Alternative Break team). Overall, research suggests that a significant aspect of organizational assimilation occurs through smaller work-groups, and that smaller groups might have a greater impact on the process of assimilation than the work of an organization.

Outcomes in Organizations.

Given that organizational assimilation is a uniquely communicative phenomenon (Jablin, 1982), it is no surprise that a variety of communicative outcomes have been associated with this construct. Waldeck and Myers (2008) forwarded that an entire area of assimilation research has emerged wherein assimilation is viewed as a social, or communicative, construct. Further, Jablin (1982; 1987; 2001) discussed a variety of outcomes that are theoretically associated with assimilation.

Jablin (1987) argued that successful assimilation should lead to a variety of positive communicative outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, climate, perceptions of culture, and participation). Indeed, when operationalizing assimilation as an individual's perception of job fit, assimilation has been linked to higher levels of job satisfaction (Song & Chathoth, 2010). Further, the ability to successfully negotiate a role within an organization, a distinct aspect of organizational assimilation, has also been linked to higher job satisfaction (Miller, Johnson, Hart, & Peterson, 1999). Communication climate has also been argued to be related to assimilation. Jablin (1984; 1987) asserted

that it is possible for newcomers in an organization to be influenced by the climate perceptions of established organizational members. Gibson and Papa (2000) found that individuals who identify with the values of an organization are likely to submit to higher levels of control and discipline than those who do not.

Overall, it is clear that assimilation leads to a variety of positive outcomes. In the student experience, successful assimilation could manifest in a variety of ways including, success, satisfaction, persistence, or retention. However, given that much of the research on organizational assimilation comes from data that is obtained in organizations that are typically conceptualized as businesses, it is germane to the current investigation to now turn toward a discussion of assimilation in voluntary organizations and the student experience.

Assimilation in Voluntary Organizations.

Kramer (2011) argued that since most of the research on organizational assimilation and socialization utilizes employment as a driving force, it was necessary to forward a new model of organizational assimilation based on voluntary membership. Utilizing the definition of voluntary organizations forwarded by Frumkin (2002), that these organizations do not distribute profits, coerce participation, or compensate participation, Kramer suggested that community groups and churches be conceptualized as voluntary organizations. Kramer's work is meant to explain the assimilation process of individuals who voluntarily choose to participate in organizations. Given these notions it is feasible that Kramer's Model of Voluntary Membership Assimilation could be applied to educational institutions. Indeed, Kramer noted that extra-curricular activities that students participate in such as 4-H should be employed in this model.

The Model of Voluntary Membership Assimilation consists of three levels. The first level involves how individuals negotiate membership in a single organization. Given that individuals often belong to numerous voluntary organizations, Kramer's (2011) second level asserts that members must negotiate their relationships across these permeable boundaries. Finally, Kramer's model concludes by accounting for members to belong to multiple voluntary organizations. In sum, Kramer asserted that assimilation in the voluntary organization is "defined as the communication process through which individuals negotiate and change membership statuses" (p. 240) as a product of a variety of processes including inculcation (i.e., learning how to do things), personalization (i.e., changing the organization to fit an individuals needs or habits), and matching (i.e., when individuals and organizations align and make minimal or no changes to the other).

Kramer's (2011) Model of Voluntary Membership Assimilation will not be utilized in the current study, however, due to the voluntary nature of college attendance its possible utility in higher education make it worthy of discussion. Individuals enrolled as students within an institution should be viewed under traditional notions of assimilation (Jablin, 1982, 1987), as the institution goes to great lengths to socialize students (e.g., orientations, first-year academies/courses). However, given that Kramer's model accounts for membership in multiple organizations perhaps the model has some utility for scholars looking to examine quality of involvement (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1984), as it could offer unique insight into the experience of students who are heavily or overly involved within multiple aspects of collegiate life. Overall, the utility of Kramer's model within higher education has yet to be demonstrated, and as validating his model is not within the scope of this inquiry, it will not be used.

College Students' Assimilation.

Indeed, many scholars have examined the process of assimilation as it occurs in students (Barkhuus & Tashiro, 2010; Bauer & Green, 1994; Myers, 1994, 1998; Zorn & Gregory, 2005). Specifically, Myers (1994; 1998) examined the socialization of graduate teaching assistants. Myers (1994) claimed that graduate teaching assistants must be socialized to both their GTA role and the culture of their department. Through his investigation Myers (1994) found that interactions with peers and department secretaries were among the most helpful activities in moving through the socialization process, while campus wide training, orientations, and other standardized processes were rated as least helpful. Graduate teaching assistants also reported experiencing both supportive relationships among both peers and mentors (Myers, 1998). The assimilation experience of other types of graduate students, such as medical students, has also been examined (Zorn & Gregory, 2005). In their study, Zorn and Gregory found that relationships among first-year medical students, while not particularly close, are supportive. Zorn and Gregory asserted that these relationships are crucial to the assimilation process. Finally, setting, past experiences, and realistic nature of collected information have been established as factors which ease the assimilation process of new doctoral students (Bauer & Green, 1994).

While scholars have examined the process of assimilation or socialization as it occurs in the lives of graduate students, less empirical work has been done on the experience of undergraduates. More specifically, while communication scholars have examined the way in which college students learn inside the classroom (Andersen, 1979; Weber, Martin, & Myers, 2010; Richmond et al., 1987), this area of study has largely

ignored how students learn in co-curricular spaces and how students engage with the institution from which they learn. However, some efforts have been made to understand the process of assimilation from the undergraduate perspective. Indeed, Tinto (1993) asserted that students must be integrated in order to succeed and persist. As a major outcome of organizational assimilation is to understand how individuals become integrated into the fabric of an organization, this is especially important. While not based in communication, Tinto's model is uniquely communicative in that it places a central focus on relationships (Tinto, 2006), which must be built and maintained through communication. Recently, Barkhuus and Tashiro (2010) examined the role of social media in the process of student assimilation finding that Facebook can help facilitate both the socialization processes which are key to assimilation.

Overall, work has been conducted on students within higher education, though most of this work has focused on graduate and professional students. Given, that undergraduates have been largely neglected in the assimilation literature it is important for scholars to refocus their attention. Therefore the current study investigated the affect that connectedness, built through alternative break experiences, has on perceptions of assimilation.

Conclusion

Organizational assimilation is viewed as the process through which individuals become functioning members of an organization (Jablin, 1987). This process is distinct from socialization in that socialization is defined as the process of learning how to exist within an organization, while assimilation describes the way in which individuals become fully integrated and engaged with an organization from entry through to exit (Jablin,

1987; Moreland & Levine, 1982). In this section, assimilation was discussed in the context of undergraduate student life, and relevant areas of research were examined.

Although it is well known that students must integrate both socially and academically in order to have a successful collegiate experience (Tinto, 1996, 2006), little is known about the role that alternative break experiences could play. Although research has noted that students appear to connect with peers and develop interpersonally/intrinsically while on these trips (e.g., Barclay, 2010; Boswell, 2010; McElhaney, 1998), less is known about how such outcomes and growth directly affects larger processes (e.g., assimilation). Given that integration is a key component of organizational assimilation (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001) and the lack of scholarship on undergraduate assimilation from a communicative perspective, the current study sought to fill that gap by assessing how alternative break experiences and connectedness with peers affects the various dimensions of assimilation forwarded by Myers and Oetzel (2003).

Group Socialization

A group is a collection of interdependent individuals working toward a common goal or unified by a common task (Poole, Keyton, & Frey, 1999). Thus the groups of students who participate in alternative breaks offer an opportunity to study group communication. Specifically, as these groups are formed quickly and comprised of students who often have no prior relationships, these groups offer an excellent opportunity to examine the process of group socialization. Notably, socialization differs from assimilation in that socialization is the process through which individuals learn to become part of a culture through communication (Anderson, Riddle, & Martin, 1999),

while assimilation is the process of entering into, integrating with, and eventually departing from an organization (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001).

This section begins by defining the concept of group socialization. Moving forward a discussion will be presented covering theoretical perspectives of group socialization. Finally, relevant research concerning group socialization from a communicative perspective is reviewed.

Defining Group Socialization

Socialization is often defined as the ongoing and reciprocal process by which groups come together to achieve the goals and satisfy the needs, of both individual members and the group itself (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Socialization has also been described as the process through which individuals become part of activity patterns (Stryker & Statham, 1985), learn enough to contribute to a group (Dion, 1985), and make sense of their experiences (Louis, 1980; Souza, 1999). As previously discussed, Moreland and Levine (1982) asserted that socialization and assimilation are often used interchangeably. However, these two constructs are indeed distinct and primarily communicative in nature (Anderson et al., 1999; Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001).

Assimilation is defined as the process through which individuals enter into, integrate with, and eventually leave an organization (Jablin, 1982, 1987; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Socialization is typically viewed as the activities and processes individuals engage in that allow them to learn the necessary requirements for group membership (Chao et al., 1994; Dion, 1985; Stryker & Statham, 1985). Socialization is often regarded as a key component of assimilation (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001). Further, much

assimilation is said to occur through group processes (Jablin, 2001; Moreland & Levine, 1982; Waldeck & Myers, 2008).

Anderson et al. (1999) offered a communication centric definition of socialization by forwarding that socialization is a reciprocal influence process through which both newcomers and established group members are affected. Further, group members engage in communication in order to “create and recreate a unique culture and group structures, engage in relevant processes and activities, and pursue individual and group goals,” (Anderson et al., 1999, p. 142). As within the assimilation literature the process of socialization is argued to help individuals to reduce uncertainty (Anderson et al., 1999; Jablin, 1982), which is a distinctly communicative process (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Overall, the definition offered by Anderson et al. (1999) reflects the standards seen in previous definitions of socialization (e.g., reciprocal, mutually influential), but also places unique emphasis on the communicative nature of socialization.

Theoretical Perspectives in Group Socialization Scholarship

Numerous scholars have advanced theoretical perspectives on group socialization (e.g., Anderson et al., 1999; Katz, Joiner, & Kwon, 2002; Moreland & Levine, 1982; Wanous, Reichers, & Malik, 1984). Most models of socialization are concerned with socialization into organizations (e.g., Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1982; Van Maanen, 1975). Two models of group socialization have been particularly heuristic Moreland and Levine’s model (1982) and Anderson et al.’s model (1999). Indeed, Anderson et al. noted that even the assimilation scholarship has described socialization as part of the assimilation process (Jablin, 1982, 1987; Kramer, 2011; Van Maanen, 1975), though these perspectives and models differ in their contextual applicability. While the concept

of assimilation is more often applied to organizations, socialization in much of the literature is primarily concerned with the socialization process that occurs within groups, rather than in organizations. Further, Anderson et al. emphasize and specifically stress the communicative nature of socialization. While the Anderson et al. model will be the primary focus of this section, a brief discussion of the Moreland and Levine (1982) model of group socialization is relevant in explicating the utility of the Anderson et al. model.

Moreland and Levine's Model of Group Socialization.

Citing lack of theory development, Moreland and Levine (1982) forwarded a model of group socialization which accounts for the perspective of both the individual and the group. Within this model three processes are forwarded as the foundation of socialization: evaluation, commitment, and role transition. Evaluation is the process through which normative behaviors are assessed. Commitment is the level of obligation, responsibility, devotion, or allegiance among a group and its members based on evidence garnered through the evaluation process. Finally, role transition is characterized by the appearance of a necessary decision amongst the group to redefine the roles and tasks of members and the group itself. The concept of role transition can be seen when individuals join, mature through, and even leave a group.

Moreland and Levine (1982, 1994, 2001) argued that group membership changes over time based on the three aforementioned processes. Moreland and Levine suggested that group life exists in five phases which are investigation, socialization, maintenance, resocialization, and remembrance. Similar to Jablin's model (1982, 1987, 2001) of organizational assimilation, the Moreland and Levine model accounts for entry,

integration into, and exit from a group. While, Jablin's model describes these processes in relation to an organization, Moreland and Levine's model describes the commitment and identity of an individual in relation to a group of people. Socialization and assimilation are inextricably linked processes (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001; Moreland & Levine, 2001), yet are indeed distinct.

The phase model of an individual's passage through a group.

The model forwarded by Moreland and Levine (1982) claims that individuals begin their group life by investigating the group and the benefits of membership. Groups recruit new members who they think will be valuable to group. During this stage individuals are labeled as prospective members.

The second phase is labeled socialization and is evident when an individual joins the group and begins to learn new and appropriate normative behaviors (Moreland & Levine, 1982). "To the extent that the group is successful in altering the individual, the individual shows assimilation. To the extent that the individual is successful in altering the group, the group shows accommodation," (p. 152). During this stage individuals are referred to as new members.

Once individuals commit to joining the group and the group commits to allowing the individual to join, individuals become full members of the group and enter the maintenance phase of group life. It is worthy of note that the Moreland and Levine model is based on matching levels of commitment between the group and individual. This stage involves continued role negotiations between the individual and the group. Dependent upon group membership status (e.g., full member or new member) the individual will maximize efforts toward the group or individual goals, with new members

setting aside individual goals to further serve the group and the inverse for full members (i.e., higher value on individual needs, lower value on group needs).

When an individual or group feels as though levels of commitment are diverging significantly from one another the next phase begins. This phase is called resocialization. This phase is defined by efforts of the group and individual member attempting to change one another. During this phase individuals are said to be marginal members. If an individual and group can once again reach acceptable levels of accommodation or assimilation, full member status is regained, and an individual returns to the maintenance phase. However, in some cases individuals continue to diverge from the group until they ultimately decide to exit.

The final stage of group life is termed remembrance. This stage is evident when individuals and groups decide to fully diverge from one another. Individuals begin to engage in reminiscence, while groups reflect on an individual's actions to arrive at a decision that will impact group tradition.

Summary of Moreland and Levine's Model of Group Socialization.

Moreland and Levine's (1982, 1994, 2001) Model of Group Socialization has been heuristic within a variety of disciplines (e.g., social psychology, psychology). Indeed, the model offers a unique perspective from which to examine how individuals and groups jointly affect one another in order to learn appropriate behaviors to reach both individual and group goals (i.e., socialization). However, while this theoretical model assumes communication as a process that occurs during socialization, it does not explicitly focus on communication. Other models of group socialization such as the

model forwarded by Anderson et al. (1999), place significant emphasis on communication and thus, are more appropriate for the current investigation.

Anderson, Riddle, and Martin's Model of Group Socialization

In an effort to provide theoretical explanation for group socialization, Anderson et al. (1999) forwarded two models of group socialization, one that focuses on individual members and one that approaches the process from the perspective of the group. These models are primarily concerned with how communication works within group processes to shape and create culture. These model are also meant to “illustrates how distinct phases and essential characteristics appropriate to group processes provide foundations for understanding communication during socialization processes, while retaining the fluid nature of the initial and continuous socialization of members,” (Anderson et al., 1999, p. 145). The models provided by Anderson et al. acknowledge the reciprocal and ongoing nature of the group processes, socialization specifically, in that both individuals and groups are affected by one another. Finally, and most germane for the current investigation, the Anderson et al. models acknowledge the centrality of communication to the socialization.

Description of the Individual Model of Group Socialization.

The Individual Model of Group Socialization consists of five phases: antecedent, anticipatory, encounter, assimilation, and exit (Anderson et al., 1999). Notably, this model accounts for an individual's membership in a variety of groups. Anderson et al. suggested each phase influences and permeates the other phases.

The antecedent phase of group socialization occurs prior to joining the group and can best be described as the preexisting factors that individuals display which affect their

experience socializing within a group (Anderson et al., 1999). Beliefs, attitudes, communication traits, and demographics are antecedents that affect an individual's experience socializing into a group. Indeed, others have maintained that individual differences will affect an individual's experience within groups (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999).

Within the individual model, the anticipatory phase occurs prior to membership within a group. This phase is defined as the feelings and expectations that are constructed in individuals (i.e., potential members) and among group members before the two coalesce (Anderson et al., 1999). The expectations can have significant impact on the entire socialization process (Anderson et al., 1999; Van Maanen, 1977). Citing the work of Jablin (1987) who asserted that individuals socialize within organizations based on prior experiences with organization, Anderson et al. posit that individuals deal with group socialization based on expectations garnered through previous group experiences.

The encounter phase manifests when individuals begin learning about the requirements of membership within a group (Anderson et al., 1999). This phase is what is typically regarded as socialization (Anderson et al., 1999). This phase is exemplified by an individual learning to "adjust, fit in, negotiate roles, and exhibit appropriate communicative behaviors," (Anderson et al., 1999, p. 150). Further, this phase leads groups to create culture, structure, and norms. Anderson et al. forwarded that goals and roles are two concepts that have a significant impact on this stage.

The fourth phase of the model of group socialization, the assimilation phase, is explained as the "process of full integration into a group culture," (Anderson et al., 1999, p. 152). The assimilation phase of Anderson et al.'s Model of Group Socialization draws

from the work of Jablin (1982, 1984, 1987) in that both models seek to explain integration to a culture. Indeed, Anderson et al. (1999) asserted that group members are socialized when they begin to communicate openly within the group, socialize other new members, and offer support.

The final phase is referred to as the exit stage. Within this phase of group socialization the relationship between an individual and a group is dissolved. This phase can be instigated by the individuals or by the groups. Indeed, Anderson et al. (1999) noted that both individual leave-taking and group leave-taking are important factors to consider within this phase of the model. A satisfying exit stage is crucial to an individual's overall experience with the group and can affect individual's future group experiences (Anderson et al., 1999; Keyton, 1993). This stage also involves the renegotiation of relationships. Because an individual leaves a group does not mean that all of their interpersonal relationships created through that group experience cease to exist. Indeed, given that the current study is examining groups that will reach a logical conclusion (i.e., the end of their trip) this is important to note.

Summary of Anderson et al.'s Model of Group Socialization.

Anderson et al. (1999) forwarded two models of group socialization: one which approaches the process from the perspective of the individual and one which examines socialization from the group perspective. Given that the current study is concerned primarily with the experience of individuals within groups rather than groups themselves, only the individual model was discussed. The model forwarded by Anderson et al. suggested that individuals are socialized into groups through five distinct phases labeled antecedent, anticipatory, encounter, assimilation, and exit. This model is relevant in that

it asserts that communication is a primary behavior through which individuals move through the aforementioned phases.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives

The Moreland and Levine (1982) and Anderson et al. (1999) models are different a variety of ways. The Moreland and Levine model is depicted as linear, while the Anderson et al. model is described as a fluid process wherein each phase has the ability to affect the other. Further, the Anderson et al. model acknowledges that due to various traits and characteristics individuals will socialize within groups differently. The Moreland and Levine model, however, does not account for individual differences. Additionally, as individuals are likely to belong to any number of groups, the Anderson et al. model considers membership in multiple groups, while the Moreland and Levine model considers only the process of socialization regarding one group. Finally, and perhaps most germane for the current study, the Anderson et al. model places unique focus on communication in the process of group socialization, whereas the Moreland and Levine model simply assumes communication to be natural and unremarkable. Thus, the current study employs the theoretical conceptualization of socialization forwarded by Anderson et al.

Major Research Areas of Group Socialization

Limited work has been conducted utilizing a communication perspective of socialization to voluntary groups. Instead, much of the work has been conducted regarding socialization to work groups (e.g., Moreland & Levine, 1991, 2002). Further, substantial work has been conducted on socializing processes of groups during the process of assimilation (Jablin, 1982, 1987, 2001); this literature has been discussed in

the section concentrating on organizational assimilation. Thus the current section will examine the literature base on group socialization which exists independent of the organizational assimilation literature. Specifically, this section will explore themes of antecedents, outcomes, and group socialization within educational contexts.

Antecedents.

One area of research concerning group socialization is that of antecedents. Indeed, given that Anderson et al. (1999) described the first step of socialization as the antecedent phase this is unsurprising. Further, Martin and Anderson have concluded that traits are meaningful and impactful in various group processes (e.g., satisfaction and cohesion) (Anderson & Martin, 1999, 2002). Despite these conclusions, research into contributing factors of group socialization, from a communicative perspective, has been limited. Many have asserted that previous experiences with groups will have a significant impact on the socialization process for entry into new groups (Anderson et al., 1999; Moreland & Levine, 1985). Other efforts have revealed attitudes toward group work are a key factor in the socialization process (Anderson et al., 1999). Chen (2005) revealed that newcomer empowerment, team expectations, and team performance were predictive of an individual's ability to socialize into new groups. In sum, a variety of factors have been found to contribute to the process of socializing into groups.

Outcomes.

Several outcomes have been examined in relation to group socialization. Indeed, examining the socialization processes of work groups Anderson, Martin, and Riddle (1999) found that positive perceptions of group socialization are positively related to organizational satisfaction and commitment. Researchers have found that when group

members are successfully socialized there is a positive increase in their ability to perform within said group (Chen, 2005). Guimond (2000) discovered that attitudes and beliefs can be a result of socialization. Such findings lend support to the assertion that group socialization is a reciprocal process through which individuals and groups mutually affect one another. Riddle, Anderson, and Martin (2000) found that socialization was related to, but distinct from, outcomes such as cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction.

A significant amount of work has been conducted regarding the outcomes achieved through the socialization process occurring through workgroups. Indeed, Moreland and Levine (2002) have conducted extensive work in this area. Effective socialization within workgroups is linked to shared mental models and clear knowledge transmission between new group members and established group members (Levine & Moreland, 1999). Further, Moreland and Levine (2002) theorized that effective work group socialization should lead to increased levels of trust. Finally, shared culture is often acknowledged as the touchstone upon which socialization occurs and is achieved (Moreland & Levine, 1991).

Contexts.

Group socialization should be regarded in light of a specific context, as shared culture within various groups could be very different based on the nature of the group (Anderson et al., 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Gibson & Papa, 2000; Moreland & Levine, 2001). Socialization has been examined in relation to a variety of contexts included online groups (Burke, Kraut, & Joyce, 2010), families (Prentice, 2008), and marginalized demographic groups (Katz et al., 2002). Each of these contexts offers unique challenges

to the process of group socialization. Most relevant for the current study is the role of socialization in educational contexts.

Educational Contexts.

Researchers have examined the process of socialization in educational contexts (Bempechat, Graham, & Jimenez, 1991; Choi, Bempechat, & Ginsburg, 1994; Staton, 1990). Many of these endeavors inspect student socialization in relation to specific outcomes such as achievement (Bempechat et al.). Others have examined socialization as it relates to educational contexts through the lens of gender (Eccles, 2005) and family (Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). Staton (1990) argued that students experience socialization into educational contexts in distinctly communicative ways. For example, a student's socialization experience is often affected by factors such as transfer status, age, and personality (Staton, 1990). Further, Staton places emphasis on the role that communication plays in the socialization process for students. First-year students have been found to experience tensions regarding the development and management of inter- and in-dependence through the socialization process, while still displaying a level of, and need for, dependence (Smith, Carmack, & Titsworth, 2006). Traditional and nontraditional students experience the communicative process of socialization into an institution of learning in much the same way (Ivy, 1987). Further, different institutional experiences have been noted to have an effect on the socialization process of students (Souza, 1999). Researchers have also explored the process of socialization for faculty members (e.g., Schrodtt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). Overall, a body of literature exists which has examined the process of socialization within the student experience. However, this work has failed to thoroughly explore the process of group socialization in the

experience of college students. Thus the current study seeks to fill that gap in the literature.

Conclusion

From a communicative perspective group socialization is defined as the process through which individuals and groups influence each other through communication in order to establish culture, pursue goals, and act out relevant processes and activities (Anderson et al., 1999). Though many scholars have described the process of assimilation as being comprised of some form of socialization (e.g., Jablin, 1982) the process of group socialization discussed here is unique and distinct. Indeed, the process of group socialization is an important factor in many outcomes such as satisfaction with groups (Anderson et al., 1999) and participation in groups (Chen, 2005).

Though theories of student persistence have argued that students would be well served to integrated themselves both academically and socially (Tinto, 1996, 2006) a dearth of knowledge exists about the role that groups could play in socializing students. Specifically, the current study seeks to understand the process of group socialization in the context of alternative break experiences. Given that students who report more positive relationships with peers and the institution are more likely to persist and succeed (Tinto), the current study attempts to better understand the role that extracurricular experiences with groups could play in the process of integration. In sum, the current study endeavored to understand the role that group socialization plays within an alternative break, which should lead to higher perceptions of integration, both social and academic, within an institution.

Introduction to the Theory of Student Departure

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) offered a model of student retention that has been remarkably heuristic. Essentially, Tinto stated that students decide to leave college early based on their level of integration within an institution's academic and social communities. This level of integration is impacted by students' goals, intentions, and commitments as well as their experience in the formal and informal settings of academic and social life. While institutions can have minimal effect on a student's initial goals or commitments, an institution can provide opportunities for students to achieve more thorough levels of integration, thus affecting their subsequent goals and commitments.

Drawing from anthropology and psychology Tinto conceptualized the concept of integration as the determining factor in students' decisions to depart early. Integration is similar to the concept of community built through connections with other institutional members. Students need to be connected to a community (i.e., integrated) in order to receive the necessary support and encouragement needed to persist. Further, these connections and integration cannot occur without some form of communication. The current study attempts to understand how participation in alternative breaks and their perceptions of connectedness to their teams relate to their perceptions of social integration.

This section begins by explicating the theory and its processes. Moving forward, a review of literature is provided. Finally, this section will close with a discussion of how communication affects the integration process and this theory's applicability to the current investigation.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure and Student Integration

Tinto's theory (1975, 1987, 1993) seeks to explain a student's voluntary decision to leave college by examining the collegiate experience from an interactive and longitudinal perspective. This theory applies to the process of departure that occurs after a student enters into an institution. Though the theory does accept that a student is impacted by pre-college characteristics, Tinto claimed that based on prior research these characteristics cannot lead researchers to distinguish an accurate profile of leavers from an accurate profile of stayers. The theory attempts to understand the interactive experience of students as they integrate within the social and intellectual communities of an institution.

Though seemingly complex, Tinto's theory is quite simple: students entering college are affected by a variety of pre-college factors that impact their perceptions of academic and social integration, and it is these factors which are the best predictor of persistence (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Essentially, students who integrate themselves within the social and academic communities of an institution will persist whereas students who fail to integrate will depart (Tinto, 1993). However, it is germane to the current investigation to examine the theory and model in more depth. A visual representation of Tinto's model can be found in Appendix A.

The following explication of Tinto's theory will begin by examining how students depart from college. Next, the theoretical foundations, pre-college characteristics, and intentions and motivations will be discussed, as Tinto argued that these factors give rise to a student's overall on-campus experience. Moving forward the current explication will examine the on-campus experience and how students' perceptions of integration are

affected by those experiences. Given that students' actions and involvement are crucial in achieving necessary levels of integration it is important to highlight the role of involvement (Astin, 1984). Before providing a review of relevant literature, a brief discussion will be devoted to the suggested revisions and criticisms of the Theory of Student Departure.

Departure Decisions.

Given that the Theory of Student Departure is concerned with students leaving college, it is important to discuss the ways in which students choose to leave college. According to Tinto (1993) there are four possible means of voluntary student departure: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. Adjustment references the process students go through when they are coming to deal with the new culture and systems of an institution. Adjustment as described by Tinto (1993) is primarily a social rather than academic process. Difficulty is defined as the problems that students encounter regarding academics. Tinto (1993) noted that voluntary withdraw typically has little to do with academic performance. Incongruence occurs when a student experiences dissonance between their "needs, interests, and preferences and those of the institution" (Tinto, 1993, p. 50). Incongruence can be both qualitative and quantitative in nature and can exist in both the academic and social systems of an institution. Finally, isolation is defined by "the absence of sufficient contact between the individual and other members of the social and academic communities of the college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 55-56). Tinto's Theory of Student Departure has the ability to explain all four departure decisions; however Tinto suggested that the theory is particularly applicable to departures resulting from incongruence and isolation. According to the Theory of Student Departure, departure

decisions are impacted by a variety of factors including goals, intentions, and commitments within the institution, which arise from pre-college characteristics.

Foundations.

Tinto grounded his Theory of Student Departure in anthropological studies regarding rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960), psychological studies of suicide (Durkheim, 1951), and previous models of retention (Spady, 1970, 1971). Drawing analogies between the rite of passage phenomenon, suicide, and college departure, Tinto argued that a student's decision to leave an institution is a result of an individual's experience, which is a product of institutional, contextual, and individual factors, and not simply one factor as previous retention scholarship had suggested.

Van Gennep (1960) forwarded that individuals moving through transitional periods of their lives move through three distinct phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. Separation as forwarded by Van Gennep (1960) is defined as leaving or disconnecting from previous relationships within a given community, including that of the family. Transition occurs when individuals begin to pass into new communities but have yet to fully adopt the culture of the new community. Finally, incorporation is process through which individuals accept fully the culture of their new community and begin to identify as a full member of their new community. Van Gennep (1960) argued that for individuals to move through these rites of passage they must interact and work with their new communities to achieve membership, while leaving membership in their old communities. It is not possible for individuals to achieve membership alone, as membership is inherently a community based process. This concept of community is important within the Theory of Student Departure.

Providing a societal examination of suicide, Durkheim (1951) suggested that suicide is the result of societal processes and pressures. Tinto posited that it is Durkheim's conceptualization of egotistical suicide that provides education researchers with a framework to study student departure. In the instance of egotistical suicide Durkheim argued that egotistical suicide occurs when an individual is unable to integrate and establish membership within a community. The concept of integration has two dimensions social and intellectual (Durkheim, 1951). Tinto claimed that the concept of integration provides an acceptable analogy for examining how students voluntarily leave college.

Previous work on student departure was disjointed (Tinto, 1993). Indeed, several frameworks and theories were provided that approached the issue from a psychological standpoint placing the locus of persistence squarely within the individual (e.g., Rossman & Kirk, 1970; Waterman & Waterman, 1972). Others however emphasized the role of the environment or context of the institution removing the student's responsibility (e.g., Bean, 1983; Pincus, 1980). The field of organizational psychology provided yet another framework on departure wherein the focus was placed more on the formal organizational structures and processes as related to retention (e.g., Braxton & Brier, 1989). The Theory of Student Departure builds upon these existing frameworks as it accounts for interaction, individual characteristics, institutional characteristics, and contextual aspects affecting retention, thus approaching retention and persistence from a standpoint that combines and extends previous scholarship (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993) is forthcoming in his acknowledgement that these concepts are simply foundations. By incorporating concepts from previous retention scholarship,

Tinto arrived at a perspective that accounts for the interaction between individual, the institution, and other factors (e.g., outside communities). The work of Van Gennep (1960) and Durkheim (1951) allowed Tinto to craft a theory that accounts for social and academic processes within an institution. Their concepts of membership, incorporation, interaction, and integration were particularly important in the development of Tinto's theory. These foundations allowed Tinto to create an interactive and longitudinal theory of individual voluntary departure that explains decisions to leave an institution, and thus persistence, where previous scholarship had failed.

Pre-College Characteristics.

The Theory of Student Departure suggests that the decision to leave college is a result of an individual's experience as related to one's motivations and commitments. These motivations and commitments are derived from pre-college characteristics (Tinto, 1993). These pre-entry factors include family background, skills, abilities, prior schooling, and financial stability.

Tinto (1993) argued that these attributes have a direct effect on an individual's intentions, goals, and commitments. An example of how family background might affect a student's intentions, goals, and commitments could be that as a student's family places a high value on educational attainment, so will the student. Skills and abilities reference the idea that some students choose to depart based on academic difficulties (Tinto, 1993). However, Tinto noted that skills and abilities could also include social abilities. If a student does not believe one has the necessary skills to succeed, then one will likely not have a high commitment to succeed, which likely will result in departure. Prior schooling describes the educational experiences of a student prior to enrollment at a

given institution. For example, if a student is prepared academically and socially for the rigors of collegiate life, one should likely be more likely to form intentions and goals that are realistic. Finances exhibit influence on a student's experience indirectly through one's families, prior schooling experiences, and external commitments.

Overall, the Theory of Student Departure seeks to explain the student experience after enrollment. "What happens following entry is, in most cases, more important to the process of student departure than what has previously occurred," (Tinto, 1993, p. 45). However, it is necessary to acknowledge and account for these pre-college characteristics as they affect the student's creation of intentions, goals, and commitments since these constructs have a direct impact on a student's overall experience.

Intentions, Goals, and Commitments.

Intentions, goals, and commitments are of utmost importance in the Theory of Student Departure offered by Tinto (1993). It is easy to think of a student's goals or intentions in terms of degree completion however research has suggested these metrics are not the ultimate goal held by all students (e.g., Kaufman & Creamer, 1991; Rossman & Kirk, 1970). For example, many students enter into college to simply gain additional knowledge and skills in order to excel or advance in a specific job, while others may have always intended on transferring due to degree requirements or other factors which existed before enrollment.

The intentions, goals, and commitments described by Tinto (1993) reflect an individual's character, previous experiences, and motivations. Further, these three constructs interact to affect a student's overall experience. Simply put, the commitment of college students to their motivating factors (i.e., goals and intentions) will influence

their persistence. For example, a student might be lacking the pre-college characteristic of skills or attributes, but given high levels of commitment to a given goal or institution, will persist in spite of that deficiency. According to the theory, students who have low commitment but adequate skills, support, resources, and motivating factors will have difficulty persisting.

Further, the intentions and goals of college students are dynamic and often uncertain. Tinto (1993) claimed that the intentions and goals of students often move freely between certitude and uncertainty. This loose boundary between certainty and uncertainty is not alone a cause for departure as students often change majors or career goals as they develop. Instead, departure is influenced more by high levels of uncertainty coupled with low motivation and commitment. These intentions, goals, and commitments give rise to an individual student's overall on-campus experience, formal and informal, within the academic and social systems of an institutional community and it is these experiences which are crucial in leading students to persist (Nevill & Rhodes, 2004; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

On-Campus Experience.

The collegiate experience of students exists as an interplay of systems (Tinto, 1993). Within the institution, students must participate in both the academic and social systems of an institution. Tinto acknowledged that the higher education rests within a larger and more global context of student's lives, concluding that college is not experienced within a vacuum. As such, the model of student departure includes external social systems and external commitments which can affect a student's overall experience.

The experiences within the institutional systems occur both formally and informally, which Tinto argued are intertwined, as are the academic and social systems of an institution. For example, a formal academic encounter could be represented by a classroom discussion, while an informal academic experience could occur when students engage in out-of-class communication. Tinto suggested that an example of formal social interactions could be institutionally sponsored extra-curricular activities (e.g., alternative break programs), and that naturally occurring peer group interactions are representative of informal social interactions. The experience of students is affected by their intentions, goals, and commitments both inside and outside the institution. These experiences lead students to create feelings of social and academic integration, which is a key component of the Theory of Student Departure.

Integration.

Integration is the process through which one gains membership into the systems within an institution by accepting the values and culture (Tinto, 1993). Most often this occurs through interactions. Working from the concepts of integration and membership forwarded by Durkheim (1951) and Van Gennep (1960), Tinto forwarded two dimensions of integration: academic and social. In order to persist, a student must be both academically and socially integrated, as the complete absence of either could, and very likely would, be detrimental to a student's experience and thus lead to departure. The importance or level of integration within these two systems need not be equal in order for a student to persist, that depends on the individual student and the culture of the institution. Further, integration should not be viewed as conformity as some have suggested (Tierney, 1992). Integration which initially represented an acceptance of

dominant culture has evolved to reference an acceptance and membership within a supportive community (Tinto, 2006; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). While Tinto did not offer a dimensionality of either academic or social integration, other scholars have. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) forwarded that academic and social integration is reflected in a student's perceptions of peer-group interactions and faculty interactions. Instead, Tinto asserted that integration, both academic and social, is built simply on interactions with other institutional members. Tinto also held that when controlling for other factors, if an individual is not integrated into the academic and social communities of an institution, one is more likely to depart.

Role of Involvement in Integration.

Scholars have often improperly defined the terms integration and involvement (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). This is particularly problematic given the heuristic work of both Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993). While these terms are undeniably related they are certainly distinct. Integration, as described above, references an individual's acceptance of a culture, while involvement is defined as the physical and psychological efforts a student invests in one's experiences (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993) noted the important relationship between involvement and integration, arguing that the Theory of Student Departure focuses on "the critical importance of student engagement or involvement," in the academic and social systems of an institution (p. 132). Integration is a state that can be achieved through involvement (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Students who become involved are more likely to develop the relationships necessary to achieve integration and thus persist.

It is undeniable that students learn, grow, and develop from what they do in college (Astin, 1984, 1993; Astin et al., 2001; Pace, 1980, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). However, like integration, neither social nor academic involvement are theorized to be any more important than the other. Instead, the type (Astin, 1984) and quality of involvement (Pace, 1980) necessary for a student's success is largely dependent upon the individual student and institutional culture. This contextually based approach to appropriate levels of involvement is similar to Tinto's conceptualization of appropriate levels of integration. In sum, academic and social involvement are positive processes that lead toward increased positive gains such as persistence (Tinto, 1993) and learning (Astin, 1984, 1993), as both of these processes lead to increased perceptions of integration.

Criticisms of the Theory of Student Departure

Originally published in 1975, the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto) has undergone very few major revisions from the original author. However, some have challenged the applicability of the model (e.g., Braxton et al., 1997). These scholars suggested that students are not homogenous and thus do not persist and integrate in the same ways (Tinto, 2006). Further, scholars have acknowledged that persistence and integration occur differently based on institutional type (e.g., residential and non-residential, two-year and four-year).

Citing the work of scholars concerned with marginalized or underrepresented groups (e.g., London, 1989), Tinto (2006) suggested that for some students it is important and beneficial to remain connected to non-campus communities. Indeed, others have argued that for first-generation students, a continued connection to a supportive home

community might be crucial to a student's success and persistence (Darling, 1999; London, 1989; Rendon, 1992). Tinto concluded that while early conceptualizations of retention required students to divorce themselves from their communities outside the institution, for many students this is not the case. The support offered by these communities is crucial to assisting a student matriculate and persist (Nora, 2001).

Others scholars have attempted to extend the model (e.g., Berger & Braxton, 1998; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Thomas, 2002). Berger and Braxton (1998) proposed an elaboration to the Theory of Student Departure claiming that organizational attributes such as clarity of requirements, fairness, and participative decision making should be included in an expanded model. Cabrera and colleagues (Cabrera et al., 1992; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993) forwarded an integrated model of student persistence which merged the work of Tinto and Bean (1982) into a unified model intended to explain student departure. Thomas (2002) advocated for the inclusion of institutional habitus. While these extensions have been supported empirically, each is flawed.

Berger and Braxton's (1998) suggestion offers poorly defined additional concepts. One example is the term institutional communication which is used to describe rules and requirements and how well students were informed about these procedures. This concept could likely be explained by examining an institution's presentational clarity as represented through a teacher or academic advisor whose responsibility is to instruct students on regulations, along with a student's own sense of academic involvement and thus integration, which can be found in the original theory. Cabrera and colleagues also seek to overly complicate the model by employing Bean's (1982) Model of Student

Departure. However, Bean holds that student retention is analogous to workplace turnover and thus poorly conceptualizes the experience of the student as an employee. While some instructional communication work has successfully applied organizational concepts such as assimilation to the student experience (Sollitto, Johnson, & Myers, 2013), organizational exit and the role of students within institutions of higher education is remarkably distinct from that of an employer-employee relationship. Additionally, Bean suggested that beliefs are shaped by attitudes in a similar way to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985), however without the concept of perceived behavioral control. While the work of Bean has been utilized by researchers, the more specified theory of Tinto's has been far more heuristic. Finally, Thomas (2002) forwarded the notion of institutional habitus which references the creation of a disposition that leads to acceptance and understanding of cultural norms. This concept of institutional habitus is similar to Tinto's concept of integration. Thomas claimed that institutional habitus is a result of experience in much the same way as Tinto posited that integration is a result of a student's experience after enrollment. While these extensions have been supported by their various research teams, none of the proposed revisions have shown themselves to be as widely influential, simplistic, and heuristic as the work of Tinto.

Summary of Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Overall, the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) posits that when individuals become academically and socially integrated into an institution they will persist. This interactive model begins by asserting that pre-college characteristics affect individuals' motivations (e.g., intentions and goals) and commitments. These intentions, goals, and commitments then shape students' experiences within the formal and informal

contexts of the academic and social systems of an institution. Moving forward, individuals' experiences lead to perceptions of integration, which can sharpen, reframe, or revise their goals and commitments, ultimately concluding with retention or departure. Taken together, when students' experience high levels of academic and social integration, they are more likely to persist. Typically, students who persist are more motivated and are more committed to their goals and intentions than students who depart.

It is important to note that the Theory of Student Departure seeks to explain voluntary departure decisions. Within the language of the theory these decisions are predicated by generally preceded by feelings of incongruence or isolation. Further, the Theory of Student Departure is interactive in nature meaning that it accounts for actions of the individual student, institution, surrounding communities, and external factors. Finally, the model is longitudinal in that it attempts to account for the many facets of the student experience after enrollment.

In conclusion, the Theory of Student Departure offers an interactive explanatory mechanism through which researchers can examine voluntary student departure decisions. At the crux of this model lies the concept of student integration which occurs within both the academic and social systems of an institution. Additionally, substantial amount of research and institutional practices has resulted from the Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 2006).

Review of Integration Literature

An extensive cannon of research employs Tinto's (1993) model as a guiding framework. Much of that work has employed the construct of integration as a measurable outcome leading to persistence and other outcomes. Indeed, academic and

social integration have been examined separately and together. The current study, in line with previous research, will examine Tinto's concept of integration. Thus, this literature review will focus on those studies which have examined integration. The current review will discuss findings concerning academic integration, social integration, specific student populations, and specific university programs. Most relevant to the current investigation is the concept of social integration and the role of specific programs in affecting integration.

Academic Integration.

Students' academic integration is partly dependent upon faculty members. Indeed, academic integration has been operationalized as a student's perceptions of faculty commitment to learning and development as well as a student's own academic and intellectual development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). In support of this assertion, contact with faculty has been demonstrated as a predictor of academic integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). Terenzini and Pascarella (1977) posited that the role faculty play in integration could be both affective and cognitive in nature. Thus these scholars suggested that faculty influence perceptions of not only academic integration, but also social integration. Further, the importance of faculty contact underscores the importance of relationships, community, and connectedness in leading to feelings of integration.

Type of institution has also been examined in relation to academic integration. Pascarella and Chapman (1983) found that academic integration was significantly higher at residential, four-year, and larger institutions, than those classified as commuter, two-year, and smaller. As such, each institution needs to be aware that students might

integrate differently into different settings. Researchers have concluded that overall, satisfying experiences, regardless of institutional type and size, are crucial to a student's perceptions of academic integration (Nevill & Rhodes, 2004; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

Several research efforts have exposed individual factors as impactful on perceptions of academic integration. Ethnicity has been identified as a factor that affects academic integration, with minority students reporting lower levels than non-minority students (Stage, 1989). Strage (1999) concluded that students who identified as white, Hispanic, and Asian-American were significantly different from one another in their reports of academic and social integration, thus researchers and professionals should avoid overgeneralization regarding how to study and serve these students. Stage also uncovered that males and females experience integration differently. With males academic integration is predictive of successful social integration, while for females social integration is predictive of successful academic integration. Parental education level has also been acknowledged as contributing factors to academic integration. Specifically, males with college educated fathers are more likely to be academically integrated than males with non-college educated fathers (Stage, 1989). Scholars have also found that a student's sense of identity is a moderating factor in the relationship between integration and persistence (Robinson, 2003). Academic integration is particularly important in the persistence of traditional aged students, with non-traditional students reporting their own study skills as more predictive of their ability to persist (Grosset, 1991). Overall, a wealth of personal factors have been identified as important in the role of academic integration.

In conclusion, several factors have been identified as significant in creating perceptions of academic integration. These factors exist at the individual (e.g., identity), community (e.g., familial background, interaction with faculty), and institutional level (e.g., institutional type). Thus, these findings offer support of the interactive model forwarded by Tinto (1993).

Social Integration.

The literature base concerning social integration is robust. Within this line of research scholars have asserted that two factors contribute significantly to a student's feeling of social integration: interactions with peers and interactions with faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, research has supported Tinto's assertion that academic and social integration are reciprocal in nature (e.g., Stage, 1989; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977).

As with academic integration, contextual factors related to the institution have been linked with student perceptions of social integration (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Specifically, two-year college students report lower levels of social integration than four-year university students (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Another factor that has been linked to perceptions of social integration as related to the institutional culture is that of the community (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

Indeed, students who adopt and acculturate themselves with the dominant social culture of an institution report higher levels of social integration (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). However, more recent research has revealed that social integration is higher when students feel as though they simply belong to a community, regardless of its dominant status (Berger, 1997). This feeling of community can arise from involvement in

residence life (Berger, 1997), student organizations (Guiffrida, 2003), and other institutionally based orientation or activity programs (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). The first year of college has also been recognized as important in creating perceptions of integration as the later years in college, particularly for minority students (Flowers, 2006). In addition to institutional programs leading to student's perceptions of community and thus integration, much work has examined the role of the individual in these perceptions.

Various individual or personal factors have been revealed as significantly impactful regarding social integration. Stage (1989) revealed that males and females experience differing perceptions of social integration, with higher levels of social integration leading females to report higher levels of academic integration, with the inverse being true for males. Ethnicity has been identified as predictive of social integration for minority students (Stage, 1989). An individual's comfort in one's own identity has also been positively associated with higher levels of social integration (Robinson, 2003). Other personality variables such as self-efficacy have also been acknowledged as influential in creating a student's perceptions of social integration, with more efficacious students reporting higher levels of integration (Torres & Solberg, 2001).

As with academic integration several factors have been found to significantly impact social integration. Indeed, individual (e.g., identity), institutional (e.g., type of school), and community factors are all factors that affect social integration. In sum, as with academic integration, scholars have concluded that positive and satisfying experiences are more predictive of social integration perceptions (Nevill & Rhodes, 2004; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

Integration of Specific Populations.

The Theory of Student Departure explicitly calls for context specific examination by stating that necessary levels of integration could be different based on the cultural climate of an institution (Tinto, 1993). Thus, it stands to reason that a plethora of research has examined the ways in which different student groups experience and perceive their levels of integration. Scholars have assessed the role of integration in the experience of non-majority ethnicities (e.g., Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, & Landingham, 2006; Flowers, 2006; Kraemer, 1996) and different types of institution (e.g., Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Others have investigated the process of integration as it applies to students with disabilities finding that these students integrate differently than students without disabilities (e.g., Hodges & Keller, 1999). Research has also examined the role of integration in relation to specific courses of study with investigations on nursing students (Fergy, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Shapcott, & Burke, 2011), MBA students (Kanuka & Jugdev, 2006), and doctoral students (Church, 2009). These studies suggest that dependent upon course of study various factors such as mock-oral exams (Church, 2009), empathy training (Kanuka & Judgey, 2006), or specific learning programs can significantly affect students perceptions of integration and thus persistence. Research concerning integration has also examined the processes that first-generation students go through (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), student athletes (Lyons, 2007), and transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). This body of research reveals that first-generation students have a need to remain connected to their home communities (Lohfink & Paulsen). Further, despite distinct academic structures (e.g., study hours, dedicated profession

tutoring) student athletes display similar integration needs as non-athletes (Lyons).

Transfer students moving from two-year schools to four-year schools report that more institutional involvement could be beneficial in creating necessary levels of academic and social integration (Townsend & Wilson). Overall, these efforts have provided support for the integrative and prescriptive model of student departure advanced by Tinto (1993).

The Role of Specific Programs In Affecting Integration.

Another body of research examines the role of specific programs play in student integration. Tinto (1993) made a handful of assertions regarding the role that specific programs could play in increasing perceptions of integration (e.g., living on campus). Living on campus has been linked to higher levels of social integration, due to a sense of community (Berger, 1997). As learning communities are inherently academic and social these programs have been linked to increased engagement and satisfaction (Zhao & Kuh, 2004), which are predictive of integration. Use of campus recreation facilities has also been linked to higher levels of integration and thus persistence (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg, & Radcliffe, 2009). However, limited work has been conducted regarding the role of service learning or volunteerism plays involving integration. Bringle, Hatcher, and Muthiah (2010) revealed that participation in service learning courses was predictive of a student's intent to persist as well as one's actual persistence. McKay and Estrella (2008) have also acknowledged the possible role that service learning courses play in the academic and social integration of students. Overall, a variety of programs have demonstrated themselves as predictive of increased perceptions of academic and social integration.

Conclusion

The Theory of Student Departure suggests that when students are integrated socially and academically they are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993). Overall, a significant amount of research has been conducted employing the Theory of Student Departure as a theoretical framework (Tinto, 2006). Specifically, a wealth of research has utilized the concept of integration (Braxton et al., 1998; Tinto, 2006). This body of research supports the main argument of the Theory of Student Departure that when students are more integrated they are more likely to persist.

Although the concept of integration lies at the center of the Theory of Student Departure, integration is based on building relationships, a process that occurs through communication, this concept has been largely absent in the instructional communication literature. However, instructional communication research does suggest that the relationship between teachers and students is an important part of the learning process (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1975; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Further, relationships among students are also a factor that can affect learning (Ifert-Johnson, 2009; Martin & Frisby, 2010). Relationships among peers and with faculty can lead students to report higher levels of integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993). As communication represents the process through which students become integrated it is important for scholars to examine this construct in relation to other communication variables such as connectedness, assimilation, and socialization. Thus, the current study examined the relationship between integration and these communication variables.

Problem Statement

Issues of student attrition and departure are ongoing in higher education (Tinto, 2006). While a variety of possible theoretical solutions have been offered to address this problem (e.g., Bean, 1983; Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera et al., 1992), perhaps the most heuristic is the work of Tinto (1993). Indeed, Tinto's claim that students who are integrated both academically and socially are less likely to depart, has produced substantial research findings. For example, involvement with residence life (Berger, 1997) and other campus activities (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Guiffrida, 2003) have been linked to higher levels of social integration leading scholars to assert that these programs lead to higher levels of retention, persistence, and success. Another campus program that could affect student integration, and thus outcomes such as those mentioned above, is alternative break. Despite their growing popularity on campuses across the nation (Campus Connect, 2011) very little empirical knowledge has been created regarding these programs. A primary aim of this dissertation was to investigate the role that alternative breaks play in affecting levels of social integration, which Tinto and others purport directly affects outcomes such as retention.

To date much of the research conducted on alternative breaks has come from anecdotal data. Scholars have claimed that students make lasting connections through these trips (e.g., Boswell, 2010; DuPre, 2010). In order to insure that these programs are adequately serving students and achieving the aims purported by previous research, the current investigation sought to ascertain whether or not students actually connect with one another in a meaningful way. Further, researchers have yet to determine if these programs make an impact that persists even upon leaving the university. Thus, another

goal of this dissertation was to understand the long-term effects of alternative break participation by studying alternative break.

Finally, instructional communication research has long concerned itself with the effects of teacher behaviors inside the classroom on student learning (Myers, 2010; Waldeck et al., 2001). In summarizing the state of instructional communication as of 2001, Waldeck et al. asserted that instructional communication should begin to explore the ways that students' communication among themselves affects various educational outcomes. While some scholars have done so (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2004; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ifert-Johnson, 2009; Myers & Claus, 2012; Sidelinger et al., 2012), research in this area is still lacking. Further, instructional communication should not limit itself to only in-class experiences (Kearney, 2008). While Kearney was referencing taking instructional variables into organizational and training contexts, many opportunities exist for instructional communication scholars to move their research outside the classroom and still remain in a traditional (read: on-campus) setting. Indeed, Kuh (1995) claimed that students often report their most meaningful experience in college occurred outside the classroom. This claim supports theoretical models such as Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984). Thus, this dissertation attempted to expand instructional communication research in two key ways: to investigate student-to-student communication outside the classroom and to examine established communication constructs (e.g., connectedness, socialization, assimilation, power) in a non-traditional instructional context (i.e., alternative breaks).

Rationale

Alternative breaks represent a growing area of programmatic service-learning on college campuses (Bowen, 2011; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Campus Compact, 2011). While the effects of service learning on students has been well documented (see Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999) less is known about these programs specifically. Despite the widespread popularity of these programs research concerning alternative breaks has been limited.

This lack of research could be due to a poor understanding of what constitutes an alternative break. Some have argued these programs are similar in nature to short-term study abroad (Jones et al., 2012; Plante, Lackey, & Hwang, 2009). However, the current study suggests that these programs deserve specific scholarly attention as they are defined by characteristics (e.g., reflection, student leadership) that help to distinguish the experience from programs like short-term study abroad programs. Further, the alternative break experience strives to impact students in unique ways not addressed by similar programs (e.g., short-term study abroad).

While research focusing on alternative breaks has been scant, some knowledge claims have been made. Overall, alternative break participants make significant developmental gains as a result of participation (Barclay, 2010; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012). Importantly for this investigation, scholars have suggested that participants build meaningful and lasting relationships during the experience (Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010; Jones et al., 2012). These scholars have also argued that these relationships persist despite the formal conclusion of the alternative break experience. Although scholars have claimed that these experiences lead students to create lasting and meaningful

relationships it is unclear if these findings are localized, due to their qualitative or anecdotal nature. In order to extend the knowledge base regarding alternative breaks and arrive at more generalizable conclusions scholars must examine alternative breaks from a quantitative perspective. As such the current investigation was primarily concerned with the student experience related to alternative break programs.

The current study was most interested in arriving at more generalizable claims about the connections forged through alternative break participation and the lasting impact of alternative break participation. These aims were achieved by examining these programs through a communicative lens, as it is communication that affords individuals the ability to create and maintain relationships.

Study 1

While a wealth of instructional communication literature has examined the role of teacher behaviors in effecting student outcomes (e.g., Anderson, 1979; Richmond et al., 1987), less is known about how students communicate with one another in instructional settings. Indeed, Waldeck et al. (2001) suggested student-to-student communication as an area of scholarship for future instructional communication scholarship. Following this suggestion several studies have employed the construct of student connectedness, defined as a student's perception of an open, supportive, and cooperative communication environment (Dwyer et al., 2004), to examine student-to-student communication (e.g., Ifert-Johnson, 2009; Myers & Claus, 2012; Sidelinger et al., 2012). However, scholarship has yet to examine student connectedness in non-classroom settings.

Scholars have suggested non-classroom experiences are of equal importance to classroom experiences in students development (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Indeed,

students often report non-classroom experiences as being of the most beneficial in their collegiate lives (Kuh, 1995). Given these notions the current study examined the role of student connectedness in non-classroom settings as it relates to a variety of communicative outcomes. Specifically, the current study investigated the role of student connectedness on alternative breaks by examining connectedness' relationship with a variety of communication variables which are applicable to the student experience (e.g., organizational assimilation, group socialization, and social integration).

Organizational assimilation has been defined as the process through which individual's enter into, integrate with, and eventually leave an organization (Jablin, 1987). This construct has also been conceptualized as being reflected in the dimensions of acculturation, adaptation/role negotiation, familiarity with peers, familiarity with supervisors, involvement, job competency, and recognition (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Jablin (1984; 1987) suggested that organizational assimilation is related to communication climate in that organizational members who perceive positive climates are likely to report higher levels of assimilation. As discussed above, connectedness is very similar to communication climate. Indeed, Myers and Claus (2012) claimed that connectedness offers researchers a measurable construct with which to assess communication climate. Thus, the following hypothesis was forwarded.

H1: Assimilation will be positively related to team connectedness

Group socialization is described as the process through which individuals and groups create and maintain culture and structure through reciprocal communicative processes (Anderson et al., 1999). Importantly, this process is distinct from organizational assimilation. Effective group socialization has been linked to clear

communication between group members (Moreland & Levine, 1999), shared culture (Levine & Moreland, 1991), satisfaction, and commitment (Anderson et al., 1999). Further, researchers have established that concepts like cohesion and consensus are related to but distinct from socialization (Riddle et al., 2000). Given the logical relationship between concepts like clear communication, shared culture, satisfaction, commitment, and the defining characteristics of connectedness (e.g., open and supportive communication) the following hypothesis was forwarded.

H2: Group socialization will be positively related to team connectedness.

Tinto (1993) defined social integration as the way individuals gain membership into the systems of an institution by accepting its values and culture. Social integration is said to occur through involvement (Tinto, 1993). Indeed, research has supported this assertion in that students who are involved with on-campus programming are more likely to be socially integrated (e.g., Berger, 1997; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Guiffrida, 2003). The impact of service learning on students has been well established (Astin et al., 2000). Further, Stage (1989) found that students who participate in service learning experience social integration in different ways from students who do not. Given these findings the following hypothesis was forwarded.

H3: Social integration will be positively related to team connectedness.

The concept of connectedness has received limited attention in scholarly literature. Indeed, most research has focused on the role of connectedness in the learning process (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ifert-Johnson, 2009). Less scholarship has examined the role that instructors or superiors play in the development of connectedness. However, Ifert-Johnson (2009) discovered that instructor immediacy was positively related to

connectedness. Given that alternative break programs often occur independently of coursework there is no opportunity for an instructor to affect outcomes such as connectedness. However, student leaders act in much the same way as instructors or supervisors. These leaders work with team members to establish norms and assist student participants (i.e., non-leader team members) in achieving gains associated with the experience. Additionally, with Waldeck et al.'s (2001) suggestion that research begin to examine student-to-student communication, it is worth examining if and how students in leadership positions among peers enact behaviors similar to those of instructors. These ideas coupled with the lack of research on factors which affect connectedness led the current study to offer the following research question.

RQ1: What is the relationship between peer leader power and team connectedness?

Reflection constitutes an important aspect of all service learning experiences. Reflection is defined as “the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives,” (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Eyler and Giles (1999) posited that reflection distinguishes service learning from simple volunteering or other forms of community service. As such the current study includes the reflective component as a defining characteristic of alternative breaks. Reflection is believed to be critical to linking the service to cognitive restructuring associated with learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Appropriate reflection is also associated with personal development and understanding of service impact (e.g., Mabry, 1998). While reflection has been linked with growth, understanding, and development, less is known about how reflection impacts concepts like connectedness to a group. However, shared experience of

service has been linked to the formation of relationships (Jones et al., 2012), thus it is logical to assert that shared or group reflection activities will be positively associated with outcomes such as connectedness. Thus the following hypothesis was forwarded.

H4: Perceptions of reflection activities will be positively related to team connectedness.

Study 2

Research concerning alternative breaks has been meager, though the findings from these studies have suggested by and large that students form meaningful relationships through these experiences (e.g., DuPre, 2010; Jones et al., 2012). However, this notion has been arrived at through anecdotal and qualitative data collected from student participants shortly after the conclusion of the alternative break experience. No research has looked at the perceptions and experience of alumni to see if these relationships persist. Rice, Steward, and Hujber (2000) employed an alumni sample to assess the qualities of effective teaching, and thus using alumni to assess collegiate experiences is an established, though under utilized methodological choice. Given that research has suggested that meaningful and lasting relationships are formed through these experiences the following hypothesis was offered.

H1: Lasting relationships are formed on alternative breaks.

Although scholars maintain that lasting relationships are formed there is no description regarding the kinds of relationships that are formed. It has been well established that students develop a variety of relationships during college (e.g., Antonio, 2001; Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006; Pistole &

Vocaturio, 1999). Students likely develop different types of relationships through participation in alternative break. Thus the follow research question was posed.

RQ1: What types of relationships are created through participation in alternative break?

Further, research has yet to examine why these students choose to connect with other participants. There is an element of shared experience that scholars have argued leads to persisting relationships (Jones et al., 2012), however other factors certainly exist. Indeed, a wealth of research has examined factors that contribute to relationship formation (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1996; Taylor, 1968). However, less is known about why alternative break participants create relationships among themselves. Thus the following research question was asked.

RQ2: What qualities make participants want to form relationships with other participants?

Numerous alternative break scholars have suggested that these programs have a lasting impact on participants. Indeed, alternative break participants make significant gains in a variety of developmental areas (Barclay, 2010; McElhaney, 1998). Further, participants attitude toward service are impacted as a result of their service on alternative break (Bowen, 2011; Garbuio, 1999; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005; Jones et al., 2012; Plante et al., 2009). These studies all result from data collected from recent participants. Thus, less is known about students' own perceptions of how they are impacted in the long term by participation in alternative break. Research has yet to examine the perceptions of alumni regarding how they have been impacted by alternative break participation in the long run. Therefore the following research question was posed.

RQ3: How do alumni feel that they were impacted by alternative break?

However, given the existing body of research concerning alternative breaks (Bowen, 2011; Garbuio, 1999; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005; Jones et al., 2012; Plante et al., 2009) it is reasonable to assert that alternative breaks have a lasting impact on participants. Therefore the following hypothesis was forwarded.

H2: Alternative breaks have a lasting impact on participants.

Finally, given that research has suggested that participants are significantly affected by their alternative break experience (Barclay, 2010; Bowen, 2011; Garbuio, 1999; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005; Jones et al., 2012; McElhaney, 1998; Plante et al., 2009) research should examine what makes these experiences meaningful. Therefore the following research question was advanced.

RQ4: What is the most meaningful aspect of alternative break?

Summary of Chapter I

This dissertation served two purposes. First, it answers calls for instructional communication to reach beyond the college classroom (Kearney, 2008) and extend into areas other than teacher behaviors (e.g., student-to-student communication) (Waldeck et al., 2010). Second, this dissertation investigated previous claims related to alternative break experiences. Specifically, that participants experience long term change and create lasting relationships.

This chapter provided an overview of appropriate literature. Specifically, the research bases examining alternative breaks, organizational assimilation, group socialization, and institutional integration were reviewed. Moving forward a clear

statement of the problem was presented. Finally, hypotheses and research questions were presented for each of the two studies.

CHAPTER II

Methods

Overview

The current investigation consisted of two studies involving alternative breaks. Given that much of the research concerning alternative breaks has been anecdotal in nature, the current effort approached the examination of these programs primarily from a social science perspective in order to expand upon the existing knowledge base regarding alternative breaks. Further, the current project examined how alumni who have participated in alternative breaks were impacted by their experience in order to achieve more clarity regarding the overall benefits and outcomes of alternative breaks.

Study one examined the experience of immediate past participants by asking them to report on a variety of measures. Specifically, study one asked participants to report on connectedness, institutional assimilation, group socialization, leader power, social integration, and perceptions of reflection.

Study two investigated the way in which alternative breaks have affected alumni. Specifically, study two examined individuals who have graduated from college and participated in an alternative break as a student. Study two asked participants to report on the relationships they formed through participation in alternative breaks and their overall perceptions of alternative break programs as a collegiate activity.

Study 1

Sample

Participants were recruited from two alternative break programs at two different institutions. Both institutions were large, public, land-grant universities. Access to these

students was provided through professional staff in charge of alternative breaks programs. Programs were chosen based on availability and the network of the researcher. Alternative break participants chose to apply for participation of their own volition. The university program then selected participants for their various alternative breaks.

Participants were 156 (Men = 33; Women = 108; Non-Reports = 15) undergraduate alternative break participants. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 ($M = 20.09$; $SD = 1.64$). Twenty-two participants identified as freshman, 59 identified as sophomores, 42 identified as juniors, 19 identified as seniors, and seven identified as graduate students. The majority of the sample identified as white ($n = 69$); other participants identified as Black/African-American ($n = 27$), Asian ($n = 37$), Hispanic ($n = 5$), and other ($n = 5$). Thirteen participants did not report their ethnicity. Utilizing London's (1989) definition of first-generation college students (i.e., those whose parents never enrolled in college), 15 participants were classified as first-generation while 135 are considered to be second- or continuing-generation.

The alternative break trips that participants reported on were spring break trips that were primarily domestic (e.g., within the United States). One hundred and forty-seven participants reported on domestic trips, while seven participants reported on international trips. All participants reported on spring break experiences. Specific locations for these trips were obtained from the sponsoring program offices and included Chicago, Miami, Harlan, KY, and the District of Columbia among others.

Measures

Connectedness was measured using an adapted form of the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI) (Dwyer et al., 2004) (Appendix B). The CCCI is an 18-item

measure that assesses student's perceptions of an open and supportive communication environment among peers within a given class ($M = 85.15$; $SD = 7.12$). An item that reads "The students in my class are friendly with one another," was changed to "The members on my team were friendly with one another." The use of the word team is consistent with the language used by participants to describe their volunteer group. The instrument has reported reliability coefficients ranging from .93-.94 (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010; Sidelinger et al., 2011; Sidelinger et al., 2012). Within this study the measure reported a Cronbach's alpha of .95. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.

Organizational assimilation was measured using the 24-item Organizational Assimilation Index (Gailliard et al., 2010) (Appendix C). This measure assesses assimilation based on seven dimensions of assimilation: (a) familiarity with coworkers ($M = 13.19$; $SD = 2.05$; $\alpha = .87$), (b) familiarity with supervisors ($M = 9.42$; $SD = 3.14$; $\alpha = .87$), (c) acculturation ($M = 17.10$; $SD = 2.71$; $\alpha = .85$), (d) recognition ($M = 14.99$; $SD = 3.35$; $\alpha = .88$), (e) involvement ($M = 11.99$; $SD = 2.48$; $\alpha = .77$), (f) job competency ($M = 14.96$; $SD = 2.70$; $\alpha = .70$), and (g) role negotiation ($M = 10.32$; $SD = 2.32$; $\alpha = .64$). Items were altered to reflect the process of assimilation to college. For example, the item "I think I have a good idea about how this organization operates," was modified to "I think I have a good idea about how my university operates." The seven dimensions have reported reliability coefficients ranging from .63-.90 (Gailliard et al., 2010). Reliability coefficients from the current study can be found above. Responses were solicited using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.

Group socialization was measured using the Small Group Socialization Scale (SGSS) (Riddle et al., 2000) (Appendix D). This 14-item measure ascertains individuals' perception regarding their fit and effectiveness within a group ($M = 60.75$; $SD = 6.84$). This measure does not require any adaptation to be applicable for the context of alternative breaks. Previous reliability coefficients have been reported at the .76 (Riddle et al., 2000). In the study the SGSS reported a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.

Pascarella and Terenzini noted that Tinto's (1993) conceptualization of social integration consists of peer and faculty interactions. Citing Tinto these scholars argued that social integration is affected by not only peers, but also faculty. Thus, Pascarella and Terenzini posited that social integration should be measured by assessing perceptions of interactions with peers and faculty. The current study utilized the Social Integration Scale (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) which is a 12-item two dimensional scale that assesses students' perceptions of their interactions with peers and faculty (Appendix E). The peer-group interaction subscale consists of seven items ($M = 28.48$; $SD = 4.59$). The faculty interactions subscale consists of five items ($M = 17.91$; $SD = 4.54$). Both dimensions of the scale have reported acceptable reliability with peer-group interaction achieving an alpha of .84 and interactions with faculty achieving an alpha of .83 (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). In the current study these dimensions reported acceptable reliability coefficients (peer-group interactions $\alpha = .78$; interactions with faculty $\alpha = .87$). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.

Peer leader power was measured by an adapted version of the Teacher Power Use Scale (Schrodt, Witt, & Turman, 2007) (Appendix F). This twenty-item measure assesses students' perceptions of a teacher's communication of power across the five power dimensions forwarded by French and Raven (1959): coercive ($M = 9.63$; $SD = 4.20$), expert ($M = 13.89$; $SD = 3.32$), legitimate ($M = 14.26$; $SD = 3.91$), referent ($M = 13.39$; $SD = 4.10$), and reward ($M = 12.10$; $SD = 3.60$). This measure was modified to reflect the relationship between peer leaders and student participants. For example, "The instructor is seeking compliance from the student based on the instructor's experience in this area" was changed to "The peer leader is seeking compliance from the team based on the peer leader's experience in this area." Previous research has reported acceptable reliabilities on each of the five power subscales within this measure (coercive $\alpha = .87$; expert $\alpha = .84$; legitimate $\alpha = .70$; referent $\alpha = .72$; reward $\alpha = .73$) (Horan & Myers, 2009; Schrodt et al., 2007). In the current study the following Cronbach's alphas were obtained from the respective subscales (coercive $\alpha = .92$; expert $\alpha = .81$; legitimate $\alpha = .89$; referent $\alpha = .86$; reward $\alpha = .80$). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*.

Value of reflection activities was measured by assessing a participant's agreement/disagreement with the following statements: "The reflection activities that I participated in were beneficial to my experience on alternative break," "I believe the time spent doing reflection activities was important to my alternative break experience," and "My participation in reflection while on alternative break was worthless." Responses were made on a 9-point semantic differential scale ranging from *disagree (1)* to *agree (9)*. Though reliability coefficients cannot be calculated for individual items, when

summed, these items provided an acceptable reliability coefficient of .70 ($M = 19.20$; $SD = 2.35$).

Data Collection and Analysis (Procedure)

After IRB approval was obtained, data was collected immediately following the alternative break experience. Participants completed surveys along with other institutional assessment forms utilized by the program offices. Surveys will then be collected and entered into SPSS and AMOS in order to be analyzed.

Study 2

Sample

Participants were solicited via online recruitment. The sample was a network sample based on the researchers' own network and a database provided by professional contacts. This study was utilized snowball sampling techniques by encouraging participants to pass the survey link onto others who fit selection criteria (e.g., alumni, former participant). Participation was anonymous and voluntary.

Participants were 147 (Men = 20; Women = 59; Non-Reports = 68) college graduates who participated in alternative break while enrolled in college. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 38 ($M = 26.92$; $SD = 3.98$). Graduation years ranged from 1996 to 2013. The average year of graduation was 2008 ($SD = 3.88$), meaning at the time of reporting the average participant had been out of college for approximately five years. The majority of the sample identified as white ($n = 72$); Other participants identified as Black/African-American ($n = 4$), Asian ($n = 2$), and other ($n = 1$). Sixty-eight participants did not report their ethnicity. Utilizing London's (1989) definition of first-generation college students (i.e., those whose parents never enrolled in college) six

participants were classified as first-generation while seventy-two are considered to be second- or continuing-generation. Sixty-nine participants did not report their generational status.

Participants reported holding a variety of occupations including teacher, student affairs administrator, realtor, lawyer, and clinical pharmacist among others. Regarding graduation, 56 participants reported graduating in four year or less, 20 reported graduating in five years, while three reported graduating in 6 years or more. Sixty-eight participants did not report their length of attendance. Seventy-six individuals reported graduating from the same institution where they participated in alternative break, while three reported graduating from a different institution. Sixty-eight participant did not report their retention status. Participants reported holding a variety of degrees (B.A. or B.S. = 37; M.A. or M.S. = 30; M.B.A. = 1; Ed.D. or Ph.D. = 2; J.D. = 2; M.D., D.O., or another advanced medical degree = 1; Non-Reports = 73). Participants reported a variety of income ranges (\$0 – 24,999 = 17; \$25,000 – 49,999 = 27; \$50,000 – 74,999 = 16; \$75,000 – 99,999 = 3; \$100,000 – More = 5; Non-Reports = 71). Eight participants indicated that they would “prefer not to answer” regarding their income range.

Based on Carnegie classifications, several questions (e.g., enrollment size, degree granting, public/private) addressed the type of school individuals attended when they participated in their alternative break experience. Participants reported on break trips that occurred at a variety of institutions. Seventy-six participants reported on an alternative break experience that took place at a four-year school, two participants reported on an experience based at an institutional described as “other,” and sixty-nine participants did not report the enrollment of the school where their alternative break took place. Sixty-

seven participants reported on public schools, twelve reported on private schools, and sixty-eight participants did not report. Enrollment size was also varied (<5000 students $n = 12$; 6,000 – 15,000 students $n = 6$; 16,000+ students $n = 60$, unsure $n = 1$; Non-Reports = 68).

The alternative break trips that participants reported on were spring break trips that were primarily domestic (e.g., within the United States). Sixty-eight participants reported on domestic trips, while eighteen participants reported on international trips. Nineteen participants reported on fall breaks, six participants reported on winter breaks, 51 participants reported on spring breaks, and three participants reported on summer breaks. Sixty-eight participants did not indicate the break they participated in alternative break during. Participants also reported on the destination of their alternative break. These specific destinations included Boone, NC, Brazil, New York City, Haiti, New Orleans, and Tucson, AZ among others.

Measures

Presence of lasting relationships was measured using nine items created for this study (Appendix H). These items assess whether or not alumni participants are still engaged in relationships with other former participants. One example item reads, “I keep in contact with the people that I met through alternative break more than the people I met through other campus activities (e.g., student government, intramural sports).” Participants are asked to make responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*. In this study a Cronbach’s alpha of .76 was obtained ($M = 29.82$; $SD = 5.17$).

Participants were asked about the types of relationships developed during their alternative break experience (Appendix I). They were given the prompt, “Currently, I consider one of the other participants from my alternative break to be...”. Participants were instructed to classify each relationship as only one of the possible selections. To clarify this point the following example was provided, “For example, if you met your spouse/partner on an alternative break trip you would only mark “romantic partner or spouse” for that relationship, even if though you might consider them to be a best friend as well. Participants were then asked to answer yes or no to nine different types of relationships: a best friend, a close/good friend, a friend, a romantic partner or spouse, a coworker, a colleague, and an acquaintance. Participants were also provided a space to report on other relationship types. Frequencies can be found in the results section. Considering that individuals may report different perceptions of what constitutes a friend and what distinguishes a best friend (Burleson, & Samter, 1996; Ledbetter, Griffin, & Sparks, 2007), participants were not provided any definition of these categories. Participants were given a space where they could submit a relational category other than those provided.

The qualities leading to relationship formation was assessed through two open-ended questions: “Reflecting on the relationships you formed through alternative break, what made you want to stay connected with those individuals?” and “What role did the shared experience of alternative break play in the formation and quality of your relationship?” These questions can also be found in Appendix J.

Impact of the activity of alternative break was assessed through two open-ended questions: “How do you feel you were impacted by your alternative break experiences in

the short-term?” and “How do you feel you were impacted by your alternative break experience in the long-term?” These questions can also be found in Appendix K.

The lasting impact of alternative break was measured using eight items created for this study (Appendix L). These items quantitatively assess whether or not alumni feel as though their participation in alternative break had a lasting impact on them. One example item reads, “Participating in alternative break had a lasting impact on me.” Participants are asked to make responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*. In this study a Cronbach’s alpha of .84 was obtained ($M = 33.96$; $SD = 4.40$).

In order to answer research question four participants were asked to respond to the following open-ended question: What is the most meaningful aspect of alternative breaks? This question can also be found in Appendix M.

Data Collection and Analysis (Procedure)

After IRB approval was obtained data was collected via online surveys posted on the website SurveyMonkey. Completed survey data was downloaded and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. Qualitative responses were analyzed using the suggestions of Glaser and Strauss (1967) along with Corbin and Strauss (2008). Utilizing the Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), themes were allowed to emerge from the data. Responses were first open coded and then axial coded (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding refers to a line-by-line analysis of the text wherein major themes can be identified by the researcher; axial coding references the processes by which coders work toward agreement on larger themes. Themes were identified by the framework set forth by

Owen (1984). In order for a theme to be identified as such it must be recurrent, repetitious, and forceful. Data was collected until saturation was reached.

Summary of Chapter II

This chapter provided an overview of the methods utilized for this dissertation. Given that Study One was quantitative in nature, the various measures employed were reviewed (e.g., connectedness, assimilation). Study Two was quantitative and qualitative in nature. This chapter also provided demographic information regarding the participants of these studies. Finally, this chapter included a description of the data analysis techniques that were utilized.

CHAPTER III

Results

Study One

Hypothesis one posited that organizational assimilation into the university would be positively related to team connectedness. One-tailed Pearson correlations revealed that connectedness was positively related to familiarity with co-workers ($r = .32, p < .001$), recognition ($r = .15, p < .05$), involvement ($r = .17, p < .05$), and role negotiation ($r = .21, p < .01$). One-tailed Pearson correlations revealed that connectedness was not related to familiarity with supervisors ($r = .10, p = .11$), acculturation ($r = .10, p = .10$), and job competency ($r = .19, p = .07$). Thus, this hypothesis received partial support.

Hypothesis two forwarded that group socialization would be positively related to team connectedness. A one-tailed Pearson correlation revealed that socialization and connectedness were indeed strongly related ($r = .60, p < .001$). This hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis three held that social integration into the university would be positively related to team connectedness. One-tailed Pearson correlations revealed that connectedness was positively related to the peer based dimension of social integration ($r = .26, p < .01$). Connectedness was not related to the faculty based dimension of social integration ($r = .04, p = .30$). Hypothesis three was partially supported.

Research question one sought to understand the relationships among the various dimensions of peer leader power (i.e., coercive, legitimate, expert, referent, reward) and team connectedness. Two-tailed Pearson correlations revealed that connectedness was significantly related to referent power ($r = .22, p < .01$), expert power ($r = .30, p < .001$),

and reward power ($r = .19, p < .05$). Connectedness was not related to coercive power ($r = .05, p = .55$) or legitimate power ($r = .14, p = .09$).

Hypothesis four predicted that perceptions of reflection activities would be positively related to team connectedness. A one-tailed Pearson correlation revealed that connectedness was significantly related to the value placed upon reflection activities by participants ($r = .23, p < .01$). Hypothesis four was supported.

Study Two

Hypothesis one posited that lasting relationships are formed on alternative breaks. Item means were analyzed and the following information was obtained. Complete results can be found in table 1. Over 60 percent of individuals agreed or strongly agreed with the item that read, “I formed a lasting relationship during my alternative break.” Only 33 percent of individuals agreed or strongly agreed that they kept in contact with people from their alternative break “more than people they met through other campus activities.” When asked if they still consider someone from their alternative break to be a best friend, only 26 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty-six percent of participants indicated that they wish they had kept in better contact with people they met through alternative break. Over 60 percent of participants reported that they had continued contact with fellow participants throughout the rest of their college career. Seventy percent of participants reported making attempts to remain connected to people from their alternative break. Forty-five percent of participants acknowledged that they still often contact people from their alternative break. Finally, over 80 percent of participants reported that, while in college, they remained connected to their team members from alternative break. Notably, 40 percent of individuals reported they had

lost touch with many people from college. Thus, hypothesis one received marginal support.

Table 1

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I formed a lasting/long-term relationship during my alternative break experience.	4.03	.95
I keep in contact with people that I met through alternative break experience more than the people I met through other campus activities (e.g., student government, intramural sports).	3.20	1.14
I still consider someone I met through alternative break to be one of my best friends.	2.97	1.16
I wish that I kept in better touch with people I met through alternative break. (Recode)	4.03	.76
In general, I've lost touch with many people from college. (Recode)	3.10	1.11
After the completion of my alternative break, I had limited contact with the people from my team for the rest of my college career. (Recode)	3.61	1.04
I've made no attempt to stay in touch with people from my alternative break. (Recode)	3.80	.82
I still often contact people from my alternative break.	3.17	1.09
While in college, did you remain connected to the people you met through alternative break?	3.99	.68

Research question one sought to understand the types of relationships that are formed on alternative break. Twenty percent of participants ($n = 24$) reported that they currently consider someone from their alternative break to be a best friend. Sixty-four

percent of participants ($n = 73$) indicated that they currently consider another team member to be a close or good friend. When asked if they currently consider another team member to be a friend, 92 percent ($n = 105$) of participants agreed. Only five percent of participants ($n = 6$) indicated that they were currently in a romantic relationship with someone from their alternative break experience. Twelve percent of participants ($n = 14$) currently consider another team member to a coworker, while thirty-six percent ($n = 42$) consider another team member to be a colleague. Finally, 94 percent of participants ($n = 108$) indicated that they currently consider another person from their alternative break experience to be an acquaintance.

Research question two asked what qualities lead alternative break participants to form relationships among themselves. Four distinct themes emerged in the data: (a) *personality and relational characteristics*, (b) *passion for service*, (c) *shared experience*, and (d) *diversity*. Each of these themes appeared as unique within the data. These themes will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Personality and relational characteristics emerged as a major theme leading participants to create connections with other team members. Participants acknowledged that the connections they made with other participants were based on characteristics that were deemed desirable in relationships. Many participants described a shared or similar sense of values, common interests, agreeable personality, and even sense of humor. For example, one participant who acknowledged a connection with all other team members because of their shared sense of purpose reported that she connected to some people “on a closer level because during our volunteering we realized we had shared interests, sense of humor, mutual friends, and worked similar or well together.” Another participant

simply said she was motivated to connect with others because they were “like minded people who want [sic] to improve the world.” Several participants said simply that it was a shared sense of values or interests led them to connect with other participants. Another example of this theme is evident in the response, “A shared sense of positive thinking and humor,” thus demonstrating that this theme encompassed not only values and interests but also disposition. However, participants did not always acknowledge themselves as similar to other participants, but rather described the other participants as possessing some sort of desirable characteristic which resulted in a desire to connect as evident in the following response,

Everyone on my alternative break trip were [sic] people who I wanted to be around. They were encouraging and fun and overall great people! Some of us had similar interests, and some were different than me. But I just loved getting to know them!

Importantly, the characteristics described by participants within this theme were all intrinsic; no participants claimed to have built a relationship based on similar appearance. Instead, connections were forged based on shared perspectives recognized among other team members. The theme of personality and relational characteristics was a major theme that emerged within the data regarding reasons why participants wanted to form connections with other members of their team.

Passion for service emerged as another major theme that led participants to create connections among their team. This theme was identified by participants’ explicit mention of service, service participation, or passion for service, as a reason for connecting with other participants. Notably, within this theme participants described a

general passion of service, volunteering, and helping others, rather than the specific experience of alternative break (see below). For example, participants stated, “I wanted to connect because we had the same goal of helping other through our trip,” and “I wanted to connect with those individuals because we shared a similar passion for service.” Further, this theme is distinct from the commonalities of shared values described in the personality and relational characteristics theme, as this theme required a direct reference to service, volunteering, helping, or a similar concept rather than a more general, “shared values.” Another representative quote come from a participant who said they were motivated to connect with other team members because of a “shared interest in making the world a better place and learning how to bring about social change; the AB [alternative break] teams were full of people who cared about others more than self; individuals wanted to serve and be engaged in communities.” While many participants stated simple that their motivations for connecting were based on “shared interest in helping others,” or “shared interests in volunteering,” others were more explicit. Such as the following statement, “We were all participating for the same purpose, to serve others in needs [sic]. That commonality encouraged me to get to know everyone better which lead to some lasting friendships.” Finally, several participants described a “heart for service,” or “a heart to serve others,” as their driving force; These statements were deemed to fall within the passion for service theme. Overall, the data showed a distinct theme of passion for service, volunteering, and helping as a key factor in the reason that participants form relationships during alternative break.

Many participants cited shared characteristics (e.g., personality and relational characteristics) or a passion for service as a driving force behind their relational

formation during alternative break. However, others more simply described the *shared experience* as a motivating factor in creating relationships. The concept of shared experience represented another major theme within the data; this theme could also be described as a proximity effect. A number of participants declared that they build relationships with other people simply because they were all engaging in similar activities. “The experience gave us something to bond over only people on the trip could understand the lessons and inside jokes,” said one participant. Another participant stated that the shared experience extended beyond the trip and service activities, describing the pre-immersion and down-time activities as important to their creation of relationships, “I feel like connection was natural, as we were doing pre-break work together, then traveled together. While on the trip, there wasn’t any TV or distraction, so it was natural to just spend evenings together playing games, talking, etc.” However, other participants simply claimed that the “shared experience,” “shared immersive experience,” or “shared experience through service.” Notably, this theme emerged as distinct from a shared passion for service as these statements did not include specific references to service, and those that did specifically referenced activities performed on the trip, rather than the more generalized service found within the *passion for service* theme. The following quote should serve to clarify that distinction, “Our similar experiences. I went on trips where I worked with people dying of AIDs, kids waiting desperately to be adopted who in all likelihood never would be, and kids living in slums working for drug lords. Only people who experienced it can truly understand the emotional toll it takes on you. It was amazing to have people who felt the same.” Shared experience played a distinct role in why alternative break participants form connections among themselves.

The final theme that emerged as a reason for creating connections among participants was labeled diversity. This theme is best defined as participants referencing diversity, unique personal attributes, differing points of view, or people they might not have met otherwise as a reason for connecting. One participant's statement could be used as an exemplary example from this theme,

My Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip allowed me to interact with individuals that I would have otherwise never encountered during my college career. My ASB team was composed of an incredibly diverse group of students and I felt that it gave me exposure to individuals who were different from me and who potentially possessed a wide variety of viewpoints, lifestyles and world views. As with the other themes other participants provided more concise responses such as "outside of normal friend/organization group," and "they were very different from me, which allowed our opposite opinions to connect." Within this theme it is important to recognize that numerous participants acknowledged the encounter with differing participants as something that expanded their own perceptions about others. For example, "I left with a lot of respect for those people that I might not have had if I met them another way," and

They came from all different areas of campus, many of which I had formed opinions about without having ever met them. For example, I had a pretty stereotypical idea of what a sorority girl was like until I went on ASB trips with many sorority girls who I loved.

Overall, by bringing differing individuals together facilitators helped to create another motivating factor in why individuals seek to forge connections during their alternative break experience.

Research question three sought to determine how alternative break impacts participants. Participants were asked to answer questions specifically pertaining to the short-term effects and the long-term effects. While some themes emerged as both short and long term effects, others were unique to the immediate or eventual effects. The current data indicated that short-term effects of alternative break participation included (a) *connections*, (b) *perspective* (c) *positive intrinsic rewards* (d) *campus involvement*, (e) *career/vocational direction*, and (f) *service drive*. Long-term effects of alternative break participation included (a) *connections*, (b) *perspective*, (c) *positive intrinsic rewards*, (d) *career/vocational direction*, (e) *service drive*, (f) *extrinsic rewards*, and (g) *memories*. What follows is an explication of these themes.

Short-term benefits.

The first theme that appeared in the data regarding short term effects was that of building connections. Within this theme participants described building connections with their peers as an immediate short-term effect of alternative break participation. Many participants succinctly claimed that participation in alternative break provided them with the short-term benefit of “increased social connections on campus,” or that they “met many acquaintances” as a result of participation. Others acknowledged that these connections led to relationships of greater quality than simple acquaintances; often these participants described creating “friendships” or making “friends”. Indeed, one participant said, “I had several close friends on campus post trip who I knew and could hang out

with.” Notably, not all connections that students made were with other students with some individuals describing making new contacts and even establishing mentoring-type relationships, as evident in the following quote. In the short-term alternative breaks, “gave me a new group of friends and people I could hang with and speak to on campus. It also gave me new contacts and faculty mentors in an office I had never been a part of.” Several other participants referenced an expanded “network” as a short-term benefit of alternative break participation. While not all participants referenced the building of connections as a short-term benefit, many participants did. Indeed, some of the other themes allude to this concept of increased connection. However, phrases and ideas coded as connections, failed to reference any concepts other than the relationships themselves.

Another theme emerging from the data related to short-term effects was labeled campus involvement. Separate from connections, this theme is best identified with participants’ recognition of their own desire and motivation to become more involved with campus and collegiate activities specifically. “It [Alternative Break] made me in seeking other leadership opportunities on campus,” declared one participant. Others expressed that alternative break participation provided them with a new sense of “confidence” or “motivation” to engage with other campus activities. Many of these students noted that alternative break participation afforded them an outlet where they could participate in other service related activities, notably these statements specifically referenced service or volunteering as a campus or college sponsored activity; many other participants stated that alternative break participation strengthen their overall resolve to engage in service.

Service support and engagement was another theme that emerged as a short-term effect that resulted from alternative break participation. These participants used words and phrases that alluded to service outside their collegiate experience, often referencing their home or local community. An exemplar statement from this theme reads that one participant “wanted to do more community service in my local community.” Another participant claimed, “In the short-term, it made me want to get more involved in the community service in the ***** [city redacted for confidentiality] community.” Others stated that participation played an important role in providing theme with an increased “service orientation.”

Another primary theme that emerged from the data was that of perspective. Many participants communicated that the experience of alternative break provided them with an increased perspective. Phrases that included concepts such as awareness, acceptance of others, appreciation, growth, realization, or reflection were also coded as perspective as they were deemed to represent some cognitive, rather than affective, process. The following statement from one participant is representative of this theme,

I think it helped me put my college career into perspective. I was in the middle of mid-terms and totally stressed before I left on my AFB trip. My experience helped me get out of my selfish world and realize how much bigger life is than my college life.

Participants described an increasing awareness of issues related to their service projects as well as their own lives, as evident by the following quotes. “I did a lot of thinking about the role that drugs and alcohol play in the lives of the men that we met in Colorado,”; “I saw school so differently. I saw that the world was bigger than my family

and circle of life at college.” Statements coded as *perspective* referenced some sort of cognitive process relating to a wider acceptance or world-view as a result of alternative break participation.

Positive intrinsic rewards was another theme that emerged as a short-term effect of alternative break participation. Though many participants described an increased perspective, others said that alternative break provided them with a sense of accomplishment or enjoyment; while other participants stated that they left alternative break “feeling good.” These statements are representative of the theme labeled positive intrinsic rewards. Alternative break led people to claim that they “felt good” or achieved a “sense of purpose” and “felt like they accomplished something.” Others were rewarded by being left energized, happy, or joyous. “I got to experience a feeling of joy of giving back,” said one participant. Another individual said they were left with a “more positive frame of mind” and “a sense of accomplishment,” among other effects. Statements coded as positive intrinsic rewards were representative of some sort of affective process related to positive emotions related to the experience of alternative break.

Finally, some participants asserted that their experience with alternative breaks provided them with career/vocational direction and skills. These individuals made claims related to the experience providing them guidance as to their future working life. “It formed a foundation for where I wanted my life to go in the future and the work I wanted to get into,” said one participant. Another participant said, “I left college and joined AmeriCorps as a direct result.” While only a few participants made statements pertaining to short-term effect of career/vocational direction, many more referenced

career/vocational skills, and not direction, as a long-term benefit; these will be discussed below.

Long-term benefits.

Some themes that emerged within the short-term data were also apparent in the data related to long-term benefits. Specifically, the themes that repeated were connections, perspective, positive intrinsic rewards, career/vocational direction, and service support and engagement. Within these recurrent themes participants simply phrased their responses in order to reflect a long-term rather than short-term experience. For example, when describing the connections forged on their alternative break experience one participant said, “I still think about it today and am thankful for the friendships formed and continue almost ten years later.” Another participant acknowledging the perspective change explicated above had this to say,

In the long term, I have learned to “stop and smell the roses.” I now think more before I engage in negative behaviors. The people I met on my trip appeared to have nothing, but on the inside, I think they had more than me. They had the ability to look at their lives and see the good. They the ability to use their faith, something that I have carried with me.

When extolling the long-term intrinsic benefits of alternative break participation, one individual said, “I often think about my alternative break and how I was moved spiritually and emotionally.” Finally, service support and engagement was represented in the long-term benefits by the following phrase, “the start of a life-long commitment to service and definitely a huge player in my decision to work within a non-profit.” In the long-term, participants describing career/vocational direction and skills again phrased

their responses to reflect the long-term as evidenced by the following quotes. “In the long-term, I found that I was very interested and passionate about the HIV/AIDS population, which I worked with during my alternative break. I am now considering that population in my career path of nursing”; “Long-term I have been able to relate my alternative break experiences to real-world skills that employers find valuable.” These themes were recurrent as both short- and long-term effects of alternative break participation. These themes were the only differentiated between the short- and long-term by tense and tone related to time, as such explications of these recurrent themes may be found above.

The two uniquely long-term benefits of alternative break participation were extrinsic rewards and memories. These themes will now be described and exemplified.

Extrinsic rewards emerged from the data as a distinctly long-term benefit of alternative break participation. Within this theme participants referenced some tangible and intangible rewards they accrued as a result of participation. While some participants referenced tangible processes or goods such as resume bolstering and t-shirts the majority referenced intangible skills. For example, many participants referenced concepts such as leadership, networking, problem-solving, and ability to work with diverse populations; while similar to the career and vocational skills within this theme participants did not reference their career or work-life. “I am able to be flexible, problem solving, and work with diverse groups of people,” was a statement that one participant made that is exemplary of this category. Other exemplary statements coded as extrinsic rewards were “Learning how to work in extreme situations and with people you may not ‘mesh’ well with,” as well as “I’m able to apply the on-the-fly decision making and leadership I

honed at AFB [alternative fall break] just about every day.” This theme was represented by a participants reference to some sort of extrinsic reward. These rewards were described as both tangible (e.g., t-shirt) and intangible (e.g., skills).

Finally, memories were acknowledged by participants as a benefit of alternative break participation that was uniquely long-term. Statements that were coded as *memories* made reference to the ability to look back fondly on their experience, while many others explicitly used the term “memories.” One participant even claimed, “I don’t think there was a long-term impact other than wonderful memories.” This was a sentiment echoed by a few other participants who described memories as the only long-term benefit; “It’s just an experience I can look back on and share with others. I don’t think it impacted my social life or molded me into the person I am today.” Though scant these statements did emerge within this theme. Others though included ideas that were coded as memories in conjunction with other ideas that were coded in other ways. Indeed, one participant who described career direction as a benefit also stated, “I have memories to look back on.” Still several participants were able to reference alternative break as “one of the best experiences” during college with one participant claiming, “In the long-term, it is truly one of my favorite memories from college” (this participant went on to describe a distinct perspective change as another long-term benefit).

Hypothesis two forwarded that alternative breaks would have a lasting impact on participants. Eighty-four percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Participating in alternative break has had a lasting impact on me.” Seventy-two percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that alternative break participation had affected them since graduation. Ninety-four percent of

participants acknowledged that they often reflect fondly on their alternative break experience. Eighty-seven percent of participants believe that participating in alternative break set them apart from other students. Many participants, 77 percent, believe that alternative break provided them with experience they were able to translate to the workforce. No participants agreed with the statement “Participating in alternative break was a terrible decision,”; participants either disagreed (8 %) or strongly disagreed (92 %) with that statement. Fifty-seven percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that alternative break participation was one of the best things they did outside the classroom during college. Finally, 88 percent of participants claimed that the values espoused on the trip still impact them today. Thus, hypothesis two received support.

Research question four inquired as to what participants deemed the most meaningful aspect of their alternative break experience. Several themes emerged from the data: (a) *connections with other participants*, (b) *connections and interactions with community members*, (c) *perspective*, (d) *service experience*, and (e) *personal rewards*. These themes will now be explicated.

Connections with other participants was identified by a majority of participants as the most meaningful aspect of their experience. Given that many participants identified connections as both a short- and long-term effect of alternative break participation this is unsurprising. Within this theme participants explicitly mentioned their teammates, friendships, or the community they formed with other participants. Some participants succinctly stated that “making new friends,” “meeting new people,” or “forming relationships,” was the most meaningful aspect of alternative break participation. Importantly, several participants indicated that these relationships were lasting (e.g.,

“building lasting friendships with my teammates”) and meaningful (e.g., “the community built among the trip members was extremely meaningful to me).” Within this theme numerous participants also expressed that the ability to form connections with people they wouldn’t have otherwise met was meaningful. For example one participant said, “being able to socialize with the collective alternative break group. Outside this event I may not have ever met or had the chance to get to know some wonderful and inspiring people.” The data indicates that connections formed among team members are often viewed as the most meaningful aspect of alternative break participation.

Connections and interactions with community members also emerged as a meaningful aspect of alternative break participation. This theme was identified when participants indicated that their interactions or relationships with service recipients was the most meaningful feature of alternative break participation. As with the other themes some participants indicated this in concise statements such as “getting to know the community,” “the interactions with the people at the various projects,” and “sharing in people’s lives and making their life better,” while others provided more robust descriptions of this theme. “The most meaningful aspect of my alternative break experience was being exposed to a different population and learning how to live life with them,” said one participant. Another began by noting that their teammate connections were important, but continued on to say that meeting the “locals,” was profoundly meaningful. Statements that were coded as connections and interactions with community members made direct reference to interactions with people and circumstances encountered through the alternative break experience; these statements did not describe any sort of cognitive change as a result of interaction.

As with previous findings, *perspective* emerged as the most meaningful aspect of alternative break participation. This theme, though complimentary, was distinct from connections and interactions with community *members* described above. Within this theme participants described a perspective or cognitive shift that resulted from their service participation. For example, “Learning the importance of helping others. It was all about perspective,” and “rebuilding someone’s home and really learning that a home is so much more than walls,” both exhibit that statements coded as *perspective* included some sort of cognitive change (e.g., perspective, learning) as a result of service. Many statements within this theme did not reference connections to service participants, such as “the ability to see social problems up close and personal and to understand them from multiple cultural social perspective has stuck with me ever since.” Other participants described a realization that occurred as a result of their alternative break experience, “Throughout my undergrad experience, I saw many people living for themselves and this was an opportunity to do something for others.” The theme of *perspective* was evidenced by participants describing a change in world view, or the acquisition of a deeper understanding of people, society, service, or a problem encountered during the trip.

Another theme that emerged from the data indicated that many participants view the service experience itself as the most meaningful aspect of alternative break. These participants made no reference to the cognitive change that was indicative of the *perspective* theme. Instead, this theme was identified by references to the service and the act of volunteering. Statements like, “helping other people,” “helping others,” and “serving the greater community” were representative of this theme. Other participants indicated that the ability to perform service while representing their university was very

meaningful; “Serving with my fellow students and representing my university.” Notably, some directly referenced the “service” as apparent in the following quotes, “the service element,” “the service experience,” and “the service we gave to others.” Within this theme most responses were brief, with many continuing on to indicate other facets of participation as meaningful as well. This theme was identified by explicit references to the general concept of service or vague descriptions of projects with no indication that a cognitive change or personal interaction occurred (e.g., “the shared experience of getting to work on a project that was interesting and meaningful,”).

Finally, participants responses indicated that a fifth theme of personal rewards was another feature of alternative break that was deemed the “most meaningful.” This theme was identified by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards such as memories and skills described above. One participant provided the following response, “Fantastic memories!” while another said that “being given leadership opportunities” was the most meaningful aspect of their alternative break experience. It is important to note that this theme was not as forceful (Owen, 1984) as others, but repeated enough to be deemed a theme by the lead researcher. Most individuals who identified personal rewards as their most meaningful aspect also identified other meaning aspects which were coded into the appropriate themes.

Summary of Chapter III

This chapter presented the findings from Study One and Study Two. The findings from Study One indicate that alternative break participants do feel connected to their teams, however this feeling of connectedness does not carry over to the larger institution (e.g., organizational assimilation, institutional integration). Further, Study One found that

a strong sense of connectedness with their fellow alternative break teammates does not indicate a strong perception of value related to the reflection activities. This finding suggests that perhaps other variables are at work in this relationship. Study Two concluded that alumni do create lasting relationships as a result of alternative break participation. Data from Study Two also holds that participation in alternative break also has a lasting impact on participants. Specifically, relationships and perspective change emerged as significant long-term effects of alternative break participation.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was primarily twofold: 1. Extend research on alternative breaks 2. Contribute to the instructional communication literature base in a unique way. First, despite their popularity on college campuses (Campus Connect, 2011) alternative breaks receive only limited research attention. Indeed, most of the research examining alternative breaks has reached conclusions based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., Boswell, 2010; DuPre, 2010; McElhaney, 1998; Noll, 2012). As such, assertions such as increased connections among students and meaningful long-term effects, could not be generalized. Thus, this dissertation sought to examine alternative breaks primarily through a quantitative lens in order to extend and support previous scholarship. Second, instructional communication has long concerned itself with the process of learning in the college classroom (Myers, 2010). However, despite calls for instructional communication researchers to broaden their thinking about where to examine instructional practices and outcomes (Kearney, 2008), research continues to be primarily based inside the college classroom. Further, instructional communication research has also chiefly investigated the effect of teaching behaviors on students. Waldeck et al. (2009) noted that instructional communication must grow into new areas of scholarship in order to remain relevant. Waldeck et al. implored researchers to expand into a variety of areas including student-to-student communication. Following the suggestions of Kearney and Waldeck et al., this dissertation utilized an instructional communication perspective to examine student-to-student communication in a non-classroom setting in order to extend both alternative break and instructional communication scholarship.

In order to achieve these ends, this dissertation was comprised of two studies. Study One examined the experience of students immediately following the completion of their alternative break. The main foci of Study One was to ascertain if students make connections among their alternative break team and how such connections impact other processes related to important processes. Participants of Study One reported on their perceptions of connectedness among their team, socialization into their team, assimilation into the university, social integration into the university, peer leader power, and value of reflection activities. The relationships observed in this study indicated that connections are formed and these connections are somewhat related to other processes. Study Two investigated alumni perceptions of their alternative break experiences. Participants of Study Two provided quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data indicate that relationships are formed and they do last. Further, alternative break has a lasting impact on participants. Qualitative data demonstrated the many ways that students were affected by alternative break including how and why they formed relationships with their team members. Overall, these two studies provide the information necessary to extend alternative break scholarship.

The next section will unpack and discuss the findings of Study One and Study Two. From there a discussion of limitations and future directions is presented. Finally, practical implications are offered in order to improve alternative breaks.

Study One Discussion

Scholars have suggested that alternative break participants form significant connections among themselves (Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010; Hui, 2009; Jones et al., 1998). Results from the current study suggest that alternative break participants appear to

forge strong connections with one another. Highlighting Tinto's (1993) concept of integration, this study surmised that connections within one program (e.g., alternative break), are not indicative of strong and meaningful connections within the context of the university as a whole, as previous research suggested. Overall, these findings suggest that connectedness plays a meaningful role in the experience of alternative break participants, but has little impact on their experience within the larger institution.

At the end of alternative break participants believe they were well connected to their teammates. This is evident by participants connectedness score ($M = 85.15$). However, connectedness in the team setting does not seem to indicate successful or meaningful experiences in the larger university environment. Connections among team members displayed weak or marginal relationships with a variety concepts utilized in this study. Only one variable, small group socialization, was strongly related to connectedness. These relationships will now be examined and discussed in further detail.

Team connectedness was significantly related to familiarity with peers within the larger university setting. Given that connectedness alludes to some level of familiarity with peers this relationship is unsurprising. Students on alternative break must be familiar with their institutional peers, even if that familiarity emerged only as a result of the trip. Past research has suggested that service learning participants are often recruited by peers who have participated in the past (Bringle & Hatcher, 1997). Thus, participants in Study One must have some familiarity with peers in the larger institution, as they likely learned about the alternative break program from the aforementioned peers. The relationship between connectedness and familiarity with peers was the strongest relationship, although other significant relationships were found.

The organizational assimilation dimensions of recognition, involvement, and role negotiation also displayed significant relationships with connectedness. Notably, the observed relationships were weak. The possibility exists that participants are just beginning to recognize their value within the larger context of the university. Students may also still be in the process of involving themselves into the university and negotiating their role as a student. Given that the majority of Study One participants were in their first two years of college this seems a plausible explanation. Further, when connectedness is observed in a variety of settings it is possible that these relationships may strengthen. The current study only assessed student connectedness among alternative break team members; perhaps when students also feel connected in other activities and in their coursework these relationships become stronger. While some dimensions of organizational assimilation displayed significant relationships with connectedness, others did not.

It appears that even though someone can feel connected to a team they might not be fully assimilated into the larger organization. Given that connectedness is primarily used to assess the communication among students, and not instructors or positions of power, is unsurprising. Previous research has suggested that alternative breaks provide an experience wherein a distinct culture often emerges among teams (Hui, 2009; Jones et al., 2012). As such it is unsurprising that students' connections within the culture of alternative break (i.e., connectedness) do not correlate with their acceptance and understanding of the university culture (i.e., acculturation). Students connections to peers does not indicate that they will also report a better understanding of their "job" as a student. These participants reported on an extra-curricular activity which they may view

as wholly unrelated to their responsibilities as a student, such as coursework. Another possible explanation for these findings may be the sample being skewed toward younger students (e.g., students in their first or second year) as these students have yet to build relationships with faculty and staff, fully understand and integrate within the culture, and reach a level of mastery as such as they believe themselves to be competent. Overall, Study One found that connectedness was not related to the familiarity with supervisors, acculturation, and job competency dimensions of organizational assimilation.

A strong relationship was found between small group socialization and connectedness. Given that socialization is a learning process by which groups learn to interact with each other through communication (Anderson et al., 1999), this finding is unsurprising. Students must learn the norms and rules of a group in order to feel as though they are connected. This relationship stands in support of other research which has found that when norms are violated individuals can be ostracized (e.g., Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010). Groups seeking to achieve higher levels of connectedness must also engage in rapport building, as supported by previous connectedness research (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Notably, some items from the Small Group Socialization Scale (Riddle et al., 2000) indicate that students must be participative and engaged members of the group in order to be socialized (e.g., “I found someone in the group who...”.) such findings lend credence to the findings of Myers and Claus (2012) who found that connectedness is a significant predictor of the participatory motive of student communication. When group members perceive themselves to be well socialized into the group, meaning they have achieved a thorough understanding of group processes and norms, they also appear to be well connected into the group.

Connectedness appears to be only weakly directly related to the relationships necessary for students to perceive themselves as integrated among peers. This finding could be attributed to the setting and length of the alternative break experience. In this study students were asked to report on their connectedness within an alternative break team, and their integration into the large context of the school. While students reported that they were both connected ($M = 85.15$) and integrated with peers ($M = 28.48$) it seems that these constructs were not as strongly related in this context as previously argued by Tinto (1993). Seemingly, integration has more to do with relational quality, than simply connecting. Indeed, connectedness focuses on behaviors that are easily achieved among teammates (e.g., smiling, laughing, and small-talking with one another) while integration is represented by more meaningful relational aspects (e.g., personal growth, attitude change, similar values). Further, alternative breaks only occur for a limited time, often less than a full week. As such it is possible that students would perceive themselves to be well integrated while on-campus, but in a team setting find it difficult to connect. The findings from the current study lead to the conclusion that connectedness in an extra-curricular setting (e.g., alternative break) and high levels of social integration among peers are not strongly related.

The results from Study One show that while faculty and staff can play a role in social integration (Tinto, 1993), meaningful relationships with those institutional players need not be present for students to feel integrated with their peers. Tinto argued that relationships with faculty and staff can impact a student's social integration. While social relationships with faculty/staff may still be important for student success, as argued by Tinto (1993), the current findings maintain that connectedness with peers in extra-

curricular settings is not indicative of meaningful social relationships with faculty and staff. As alternative breaks are led by students and only involve faculty/staff in a limited capacity, this finding is not unexpected.

The weak and non-significant relationships among the two dimensions of social integration and connectedness could be due to the measurement of social integration utilized in this study. Connectedness is a communication centric construct, and while integration can only occur through communication, as argued earlier, the measurement instrument forwarded by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) does not place any emphasis on communication. Rather, the items of their scale focuses more on the influence of relationships and outcomes associated with quality relationships. For example, one item reads, “My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.” As Tinto (1993) defined integration as the process through which membership is gained into an organization, perhaps a more communication based approach to studying integration would be more telling of students’ experiences than the measure utilized with the current study. A sample item from a communication based measure of integration could read, “I have satisfying communication with many of my campus peers,” or “I have peers on campus who I communicate openly with.” Communication scholars should re-examine the measurement of social integration by exploring the possibility of employing communication as a guiding construct in the achievement of integration.

The current study extends the literature base of instructional communication by examining student leaders as individuals that can be conceptualized and examined as individuals who act in similar ways to instructors. Specifically, the current study utilized

a well established instructional communication construct typically used to assess teacher behavior (e.g., power) to examine student-leaders' impact on the experience of alternative break participants. To date teacher behaviors have dominated the bulk of instructional communication literature leading Waldeck et al. (2001) to call for instructional communication researchers to focus more on student-to-student communication in order to grow. Indeed, many scholars have answered this call. Along with the connectedness literature discussed in chapter 1, Myers et al. (2010) discovered that peer relationships characterized by moderate to high levels of trust and self-disclosure are positively related to both affective and cognitive learning. Quality peer relationships are also positively related to connectedness (Sollitto et al., 2013). However, these studies assume that students are of equal status. Further, these studies situate the student-to-student communication in the context of the classroom. It is widely accepted and understood that students have significant and meaningful interactions outside the classroom (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Indeed, in formal settings students often have to lead peers, and this is particularly true in extracurricular settings such as Greek life, student government, and most germane for the current study alternative break. The current study opens new avenues for instructional communication researchers by situating student leaders as individuals who can have significant impact on their peers through the display of well established teaching behaviors.

Significant relationships among the power bases and connectedness were revealed. The prosocial power bases of referent, expert, and reward were found to significantly relate to connectedness. Prosocial power bases have been linked to a number of positive student outcomes including affective learning (McCroskey,

Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985) and cognitive learning (Richmond et al., 1987) among others (e.g., motivation, Richmond, 1990). Maybe the expertise of peer leaders provides students with the necessary framework to connect. For example, if a leader is perceived as having no expertise, then connectedness may not be achievable due to participants' resistance (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989). Peer leaders who embody and display referent, expert, and reward power are likely to have more connected teams than those who do not.

Antisocial power bases (i.e., legitimate and coercive) did not display significant relationships with connectedness. Overall, students appear not to view their alternative break peer-leaders as holding significant amounts of power as the sub-scale means were low, though not so low as to suggest power is not present. Perhaps peer leaders would be regarded as more powerful in more highly structured activities (e.g., SGA, Greek life, club sports) or when appointed by an instructor in a course workgroup. In these settings, the legitimacy of the position and the ability to offer punishment may affect other perceptions of other power bases and outcomes. The current study found that in the alternative break settings, with loosely defined power structures, student leader displays of legitimate and coercive power do not significantly impact perceptions of connectedness.

Besides reporting on their leader, students were also asked to provide their perceptions of reflection activities. The importance of reflection in service-learning experiences is well documented (Ash et al., 2005; Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mabry, 1998). Scholars have also found that reflection is critical to gains made by alternative break participants specifically (Garbuio, 1999; Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo,

2005; McElhaney, 1998). Reflection should serve as an opportunity for students to make meaning of the activities they have participated in and grow closer with their peers through discussing their experiences. The current study discovered that connectedness and participant perceptions of reflection as a valuable activity are only weakly related. Perhaps when working through a construct such as meaningfulness of service, the relationships between connectedness and value of reflection might be strengthened. For example, connected students who had a meaningful or intellectually challenging service experience might find more value in reflections. The current study did not endeavor to assess participants' perceptions of the service, only their communicative experience. Participants in this study may have engaged in service where they found only limited meaning, or in service activities they simply displayed and therefore they found only minimal value in reflection. Along with meaningfulness, shared experience may also affect this relationship. Students may have been engaging in service activities that removed them from the group and thus the shared experience of serving was lost. The findings from Study One offer the knowledge that connectedness alone does not strongly relate to students' perceptions of reflection as a valuable activity.

Not considering the role that communication and personality traits may play might account for the weak relationships observed in the current study. Notably, connectedness displayed many weak relationships. Alternative break participants may possess any number of communicative and personality traits that affect their ability to thrive (e.g., connect, socialize) within a group, but hinder their ability to assimilate and integrate within the larger institution. McCroskey (1982) noted that communication apprehension can be stronger in particular situations, such as group interactions and

public speaking. Other communication traits that could be at work in these relationships include socio-communicative style (Richmond & Martin, 1998), argumentativeness (Infante & Rancer, 1982), and willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1998). Another possible explanation could be seen in the communication motives literature (Rubin & Martin, 1998). College students do not report being motivated to participate in alternative break, service-learning or volunteering for social reasons and instead are motivated more by their own value structure and interpersonal needs (Boswell, 2010; Johnson & Martin, 2013; Ostwald & Runge, 2004). As such, perhaps students are not motivated to communicate for reasons that could be considered social or self-serving such as inclusion, affection, or pleasure.

Personality traits such as the big-five (i.e., extraversion-introversion, agreeableness-antagonism, conscientiousness-lack of direction, neuroticism-emotional stability, openness-closedness to experience) (John & Srivastava, 1999) may also impact students' desire to connect and assimilate in differing contexts. For example, if students are well accustomed to small group interactions perhaps they have no problem connecting during those situations, but within larger contexts such as the entire university, these students are inexperienced and thus withdraw or remove themselves. Personality traits could provide a more robust explanation for the relationships found within Study One.

In this study, connectedness displayed weaker relationships with other variables than anticipated based on previous research (e.g., Jablin, 1982; Tinto, 1993) suggest should be stronger. As such, it is possible that connectedness is more useful as a moderator variable as evidenced by the work of Sidelinger and colleagues (2010, 2011,

2012) than as a direct predictor. Moderators have the ability to further affect the relationships found among a given set of variables. Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) found that connectedness mediates the relationship between confirmation and student classroom involvement. Connectedness also partially moderates the relationship between teacher misbehaviors and outcomes such as out-of-class involvement and self-regulated learning (Sidelinger et al., 2011). Although connectedness does directly relate to some variables (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Myers & Claus, 2012; Sidelinger et al., 2012), findings indicate that it often serves a more useful function as a moderating variable. The current dissertation holds that connectedness is a viable construct worthy of use in future instructional communication research as it is distinct from other similar variables and may serve to further elucidate the relationships between teacher behaviors, student experiences, and beneficial outcomes. However, future scholarship should employ research designs that allow for higher level statistical testing in order to better examine connectedness' utility as a mediating (or moderating) variable when assessing student outcomes.

Finally, Study One provides support for the use of instructional communication variables, processes, and concepts in non-classroom settings. Indeed, more researchers should follow the suggestion of Kearney (2008) who encouraged instructional communication researchers to explore established knowledge claims in nontraditional instructional settings. It is well established that students learn from and are impacted by not only what transpires within their classes, but also what they experience outside the classroom (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). To date instructional communication continues to focus primarily on the college classroom as a context for

creating knowledge. The current study seeks to continue efforts of instructional scholars (e.g., Braithwaite, 1997; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Turman, 2003; Wang, 2012) to extend investigations outside of that context. Further, under the direction of Waldeck et al. (2001), the current study extends the growing instructional communication literature which focuses on student-to-student communication. Additionally, the current study successfully employed variables from a variety of other communication sub-disciplines (e.g., group and organizational), and thus continues to extend instructional communication in that regard as well. The success of Study One indicates that researchers can and should explore instructional communication concepts in non-classroom collegiate settings as these environments are rife with occasions to gain knowledge and affect practice.

Study Two Discussion

To date, alternative break scholarship has used anecdotal data to make claims that students form connections among themselves that persist long after the conclusion of the trip (e.g., Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010). Study Two utilized an alumni sample in order to further investigate these claims. Findings suggest that meaningful and lasting connections among participants do occur. Further, alternative breaks impact participants in a variety of other meaningful ways.

Connections with peers.

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence that alternative break participants create meaningful connections among themselves. This assertion supports earlier claims based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., Bohon, 2007; Dupree, 2010; Hui, 2009; McElhaney, 1998). These relationships range in quality and type

ranging from acquaintance to best friend. Overall, it seems clear that alternative break leads people to form connections as the majority of this alumni sample claimed that they still consider someone they met through alternative break to be a friend. Given that previous research indicated this was likely to be the case, that meaningful relationships are formed as a result of participation, Study Two also inquired as to what prompted participants to make these connections.

When participating in alternative break, the alumni who comprised this sample felt as though their fellow participants were homogenous in some other quality such as their level of involvement with campus, passion for service, or personality characteristics. In describing the college experience, Nathan (2006) noted that in many physical spaces on campus, students congregate with others who look similar to themselves. This notion is similar to the Matching Hypothesis which claims individuals seek out romantic partners that are of approximate equal attractiveness as themselves (Berschied, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971). Organizational communication research (Sias & Cahill, 1998) and interpersonal relationship scholarship (Kurth, 1970) have also forwarded claims that perceived similarity is an important factor contributing to relationship formation. This study discovered that connections are formed due to a shared sense of values, personality qualities, and passion for service.

As college students are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons (Chapman & Morely, 1999; Chesbrough, 2011; Fitch, 1991; Winniford, Carpenter, & Grider, 1995) the notion that these students connect based on a shared enjoyment and desire to perform service is meaningful. Eyler and Giles (1999) find that through service participants learn that others (i.e., other service participants and service recipients) are “like me” (p. 31).

Indeed, these findings support such claims. Students need not be uniform in order to form connections, but only similar. The results of this study further these claims finding that students connect with those who embody similar interests, goals, values, and personality characteristics.

The shared experience was also acknowledged as a key factor leading to the creation of relationships. Previous research has concluded that shared experiences such as organizational contexts and cultures are a key factor for relationship formation (Werner, Brown, Altman, & Staples, 1992). Additionally, shared tasks and extra-organizational socializing have been acknowledged as important factors for workplace acquaintances moving toward friendships (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Alternative break scholarship has found that student-student connections were strengthened when returning from alternative breaks, due to the ability to help make sense of the experience (Jones et al., 2012). The current study holds that the shared experience plays a significant role in relationships formed on alternative even while the trip is still occurring.

Overall, alumni reported that the relationships they formed with other participants were a significant benefit of their alternative break experience. Previous alternative break research had suggested that relationships are formed that sustain after the conclusion of the experience (Bohon, 2007; DuPre, 2010; Jones et al., 2012). The current study supports these assertions. Many alumni report that the most meaningful aspect of their alternative break experience was indeed the relationships formed. Further, these results indicate that these relationships persist even after participants leave their school suggesting that perhaps these relationships have as much, if not more, meaning than those created in other campus settings.

Other Outcomes of Alternative Break Participation.

The formation of peer relationships was not the only outcome that alumni reported experiencing as a result of their involvement with alternative breaks. Specifically, participants report some sort of perspective change. Connections with community members, increased or reaffirmed passion for service, career and vocational direction, and other rewards also emerged as benefits of alternative break participation. These other benefits will now be unpacked and discussed.

Aside from connections with other participants, perspective change emerged as the most notable effect of alternative break participation. A hallmark of service-learning is that participants experience some sort of cognitive change (Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). This finding supports previous alternative break scholarship which discovered that alternative break participation leads to some type of cognitive change (Bowen, 2011; Jones et al., 2012; McElhaney, 1998; Rhoads & Neurer, 1998). This finding is important because previous research was based on immediate past participants. This study reaches this conclusion from data generated by alumni. As such, even years later participants still report that alternative break made an indelible impact on the way they view and approach the world. Additionally, given that this study defined alternative breaks as extra-curricular activities (i.e., not including a course component) this finding is significant. Most investigations of traditional service-learning activities examine course-based programs to understand the outcomes associated with participation. The current study finds that the act of service leads to similar cognitive gains, which herein were labeled as perspective change. This could be attributed to a number of factors including meaningful interactions with community members.

Eyler and Giles (1999) observed that service-learning participants who have meaningful interactions with service recipients describe themselves as being highly impacted by those encounters. Researchers examining alternative breaks have made similar claims (e.g., Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005). The data from this study reaffirms this conclusion. Alumni cite interacting with community members as one of the most meaningful aspects of alternative break participation. As previous service-learning scholarship has made similar claims (Eyler & Giles, 1999; King, 2004) this finding is not unexpected.

Previous research had suggested that alternative break participants are impacted in a variety of developmental ways (e.g., Barclay, 2010; Garbuio, 1999). Barclay (2010) found that alternative break participants make significant gains across all of Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of student development. However, direct reference to career/vocational development has been absent. The current study found that alumni reported that they received some form of career or vocational guidance as a result of participating. Astin et al. (2000) reported similar findings that service-learning participation significantly impacted student's desire to participate in service post-graduation or pursue a career that included service. Again, the majority of previous research is based on course-based service-learning. As the current study investigated non-course based extra-curricular programs, these findings indicate that alternative break could serve a larger purpose than previous researchers had believed.

Study Two conclusion.

Alternative breaks significantly impact participants in a variety of ways. Relationships among participants persist even post-graduation. Further, these

relationships are deemed remarkably meaningful by alumni. Alternative break participation also results in cognitive (e.g., perspective), affective (e.g., pride of accomplishment), and behavioral (e.g., continued service participation) changes. The defining characteristics (e.g., extracurricular, non-course based) of alternative break play a significant role in these gains as this unique programmatic experience provides students with opportunities to make positive gains in a variety of ways. Alternative break allows participants to connect with others while also experiencing personal growth and development.

Limitations and Future Directions

Study One

Study One was primarily correlational and given the strength of the observed relationships can offer only limited insight into the role of connectedness in affecting educational (e.g., integration) and organizational outcomes (e.g., assimilation). When examined in light of other connectedness research, Study One may provide evidence that connectedness plays a more meaningful role as a moderating or mediating variable. As noted previously, Sidelinger et al. (2011) and Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) found that connectedness served as a useful mediator. Future research designs should allow for advanced statistical testing which could test mediating and moderating relationships in order to gain a better understanding of connectedness' role in affecting educational and organizational outcomes.

The weak relationship observed in Study One between connectedness and assimilation may be an indication that other variables such as activity, context, or institutional type, affect this relationship. For example, Study One asked participants to

report their perceptions of assimilation into the entire university experience. Students may feel more assimilated into smaller organizations within the university, like the academic department that houses a student's major, or the programming office that supports a given activity (e.g., alternative break). As such, future research should examine how connectedness in one setting affects perceptions of assimilation in other organizational aspects of an institution (e.g., a specific office or department).

Data from Study One was only collected after the completion of the alternative break. Therefore it is impossible to make claims of causality. Scholars should employ research designs that allow for pre- and post-experience comparisons. Such designs will allow researchers to gain a more complete understand of alternative breaks and connectedness.

Additionally, Study One drew participants from two large land-grant institutions. A real possibility exists that a majority of these students never fully assimilate into these types of schools due to their size. Future research should compare the experiences of students at large and small schools. Such findings could help to articulate both the mission of alternative break programs regardless of institutional type and the goals that should be unique to a given institution.

The finding that connectedness was not related to the faculty interaction dimension of social integration raises interesting questions. McKay and Estrella (2008) found that faculty played a significant role in the level of integration reported by service learning participants with first-generation student status (i.e., neither parent enrolled in college). Though alternative breaks are by definition student led, future research should investigate the differing outcomes that occur between more traditional service-learning

and alternative break trips. Such research could not only contribute to knowledge regarding service learning, but also offer unique practical implications to professionals.

Future research should also continue to examine the ways that student leaders exhibit teacher behaviors. Such projects could provide much needed insight into how students impact the educational and organizational outcomes of their peers. The current study found weak relationships, possibly due to the type of programs under investigation. Future research could examine the role of student leader displays of teacher behaviors (e.g., power, immediacy) in contexts with more clearly defined roles. Such investigations give instructional communication scholars additional avenues to explore while outside the classroom.

Though social integration was only weakly related to the hypothesized variables, its use in this study is noteworthy. Indeed, Tinto's (1993) concept of integration inherently utilized communication and therefore should be more prevalent in the communication literature. However, to date this concept has received limited attention. Given integration's theoretical grounding and potential for practical implications this concept should be used more. As previously described, future research should investigate the measurement of this construct. Scholars can also use existing measures of social integration (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) to examine how communication behaviors and practices exhibited by individuals (e.g., information seeking), teachers (e.g., immediacy), and the institution (e.g., structural clarity) affect this concept. Such research would create meaningful practical and theoretical knowledge necessary for the growth of instructional communication.

Study Two

Study Two utilized a convenience-snowball sample of past graduates (i.e., alumni) who completed an alternative break experience during college. The chance that no unhappy individuals (e.g., individuals who did not form connections) participated does exist. Thus, this is an area that future research could explore. For example, researchers could partner with institutional programs, rather than their own networks, to create these samples and as such gain access to a larger sample who potentially had more diverse experiences in regards to their satisfaction and connections with others students.

Instructional communication researchers traditionally employ convenience samples from communication courses with few exceptions. Rice et al. (2000) successfully utilized an alumni sample in their examination of effective teaching. This study demonstrates that it is possible to utilize alumni samples for other research topics as well. Future research should continue to inquire with alumni about their experiences within college to ascertain the long reaching impact of any variety of curricular or extra-curricular programs, teaching behaviors, or institutional practices.

This study examined perceptions of a specific program, and did not examine alumni's current level of involvement with the school (e.g., donations, alumni association participation). Thus future research should seek to discover the role of alternative break in creating engaged alumni. Ifert-Johnson (2004) examined how college involvement contributed to alumni community participation after graduation finding that involvement in college led to involvement after college. However, Ifert-Johnson did not examine involvement in a specific program or alumni involvement with their alma mater. Given that scholars such as Volkwein (2010) have suggested that alumni outcomes could be

assessed along a variety of metrics such as participation in alumni associations, monetary giving, mentoring and recruiting current students, among other possibilities, future research could inquire as to a specific program's role in these outcomes.

Given that previous research on relationships formed during alternative breaks was based primarily on anecdotal evidence, Study Two could be used to inform both scholarship and practice related to alternative break and immersive service-learning. For example, Study Two discovered that alumni formed and maintained a variety of relationships; future research could delve deeper into how these relationships are maintained. Research has established that students form a variety of relationships while in college (e.g., Antonio, 2001; Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006; Pistole & Vocaturo, 1999). Perhaps paired data from both relational actors could offer a more robust picture of the relationships formed and maintained as a result of participation in programs such as alternative break.

Practical Implications

The current dissertation is able to offer a number of practical implications regarding alternative breaks and the role of connectedness in higher education. Overall, the results from both Study One and Study Two indicate that connections are formed as a result of participation in alternative break. These connections are an excellent opportunity to assist in student persistence, success, and the creation of active alumni.

The current dissertation finds that students make meaningful connections on alternative break. The creation of relationships during college is an important aspect of the student experience (e.g, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2004). Scholars have long asserted that meaningful relationships with peers can lead to positive outcomes such as learning

and cognitive development (Pascarella, 1985), and persistence (Tinto, 1993), among others (e.g., Weidman, 1989). Importantly, the current dissertation does not posit that students should be forced into alternative break participation, as previous scholarship has found that students forced to participate in immersive service learning do not reap the same benefits as students who participate voluntarily (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). Instead, it is important that professionals who support and program alternative breaks be aware of the nuances related to alternative breaks.

As research has demonstrated that students who take part in immersive service experiences often experience negative outcomes (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004) it is important not to coerce or pressure students into alternative break participation. However, it is plausible that many students are unaware of alternative break. Thus, professionals should attempt to reach out to students who might not know about these experiences. For example, non-residential students are often less involved with campus life than residential students (Astin, 1984) and therefore may not be aware of these experiences. Further, given that alternative break leads to connections, at-risk students should also be targeted by alternative break marketing. While increased attention to marketing and promotion efforts does not insure that all students who want to participate will do so, it does raise the possibility that more students will be able to accrue the many benefits of alternative break (e.g., connections, development). Such connections and development may help with efforts to affect students (e.g., learning development, retention) found throughout an institution's mission.

As relationships are vital to a successful collegiate experience (e.g., Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1993), the current dissertation suggests that it is also important for

professionals to take measured steps to assist with relationship formation. For a practitioner to simply group students together into teams, place them into a service project, and expect connections to form would be foolish. Here the importance of pre-trip socialization can be seen. Study One found that connectedness and small group socialization were strongly related. As such, it is important for alternative break participants to experience pre-trip meetings where expectations are clearly set and group norms begin to emerge. Such pre-trip meetings allow participants to start the group socialization process prior to the alternative break. Professionals should also interpret this finding as indicative of the importance of providing students other opportunities to connect outside of sanctioned pre-break meetings. For example, students may be grouped together and encouraged to have lunch together. Small steps such as this may prove highly beneficial to the experience of students, especially those students who possess communication traits that may inhibit their ability to thrive in larger group settings (e.g., communication apprehension). When students are properly socialized they are more likely to connect, therefore professionals should make concerned efforts to socialize students prior to the trip.

While connections are an important aspect of alternative breaks, these experiences must first be rooted in meaningful service. Previous scholarship has found that social outcomes (e.g., relationships) are an added benefit of service-learning participation and not a determining motivation (e.g., Boswell, 2010; Chapman & Morley, 1999). Thus, it is critical for professionals to insure that alternative break experiences are centered around meaningful and powerful service opportunities. Such service opportunities provide students with a chance to develop intrapersonally (Barclay, 2010) and connect

interpersonally (e.g., McElhaney, 1998). Jones et al. (2012) found that the shared experience of meaningful service allowed students to strengthen their connections upon returning to their day-to-day lives. Indeed, Study Two participants reported that their ability to share the experience of helping people through alternative break with other participants was a driving force behind their ability to connect and remain connected to one another. Practitioners should take special care to insure that service remains the central focus of alternative break experiences.

Professionals may also find importance in this dissertation's findings related to value of reflection. Meaningful and valuable reflection does not occur without careful planning and thoughtful leadership. Boswell (2010) discovered that students often find highly structured reflection activities to be forced and non-beneficial. Study One found that perceptions of connectedness were only minimally related to a participant's perception of the value of reflection. This finding indicates that value of reflection is based on factors other than the connections formed among students, as the scale mean indicates that students did find value in their reflective activities. Notably, the current study does not hold that structured reflection activities are inherently detrimental to positive gains, as suggested by Boswell (2010). Instead, the current dissertation calls to attention the notion that practitioners cannot simply assume that valuable reflection opportunities will occur based on the connections forged among participants. As student trip leaders are most often the individuals who lead reflection activities, professionals should be sure to train these students on reflection's importance in the alternative break process, and emphasize that valuable reflection is a result of more than group connectedness. Overall, factors that contribute to the creation of meaningful reflection is

an avenue for further study by communication and education scholars alike. While reflection is a critical component of service learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999) this study calls attention to the notion that meaningful connections and meaningful reflection do not necessarily occur in tandem.

Alumni also reported connecting with other participants because they were not likely to encounter these participants in other settings. Thus, despite the findings that these individuals were similar in some regard, these students had not forged connections in their everyday student experience. Professionals should remain aware of this when creating teams. Hu and Kuh (2003) revealed that students who experience racial diversity are positively impacted in both their learning and development. Less work however has been conducted on students who are simply not homogenous in nature (e.g., Greek students and non-Greek students, student-athletes and non-student-athletes). The findings from this study suggest that non-homogenous groups, across a variety of categories, were important in allowing students to make connections. The notion that many students connected with others they might not have otherwise encountered is significant for practitioners. When constructing alternative break teams professionals should be aware of diversity among teams serves an important purpose and can help to facilitate connections within a team.

Many alumni state that they continue to perform service later in life. Perhaps a worthy program for alternative break professionals to create would be alumni service projects. This could be sponsored in conjunction with alumni services. Volkwein (2009) posits that active alumni who remained involved in their university community are more likely to contribute resources such as time and money to their alma mater. Service

projects for alternative break alumni would allow for professionals to remain connected to past participants, and present them with the opportunity to remain involved with alternative break in a variety of ways. Of course monetary donations are one way that alumni may support alternative break trips, but alumni may also sponsor team meals, activities, or service-projects should a break trip occur in proximity to their current location. In short, alumni networks are a resource that alternative break professionals should explore as a means to grow and support their programs.

Finally, this dissertation confirms previous scholarship that alternative break experiences have a lasting impact on participants. Participants report that connections among the team and connections with community members, were among the most meaningful aspects of their experience. While practitioners cannot force students to experience a perspective change, some practices can help insure that participants have meaningful and transformative alternative break experiences. Gumpert and Kraybill-Greggo (2005) found that alternative break participants experienced a decrease in judgmental attitudes toward service recipients. Within this study that notion is present in the themes labeled perspective. The findings of Gumpert and Kraybill-Greggo indicate that it is important for alternative break experiences to include service opportunities that include interactions with those receiving the service. Thus, this dissertation suggests that alternative break experiences feature components wherein participants interact with community members.

Professionals can find numerous implications in the current dissertation. Foremost, alternative break experiences present higher education professionals with an opportunity to facilitate connections that can help students learn, develop, persist, and

succeed. Next, pre-trip activities may serve an important purpose in creating meaningful connections through effective socialization and familiarity with peers. This dissertation also highlights the importance of building alternative break experiences around meaningful service opportunities. Additionally, this dissertation highlights the important role that alumni may be able to play in the increased growth and development of alternative break programs. Overall, alternative break practitioners should employ the findings herein to enhance their programs.

Conclusion

College students are still developing and creating their own identities (Chickering, 1969). As such, college can be a difficult experience leading many students to depart prior to degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) posited that meaningful relationships were critical in the persistence and matriculation of students. One way that students may form meaningful relationships during college is through participation in alternative break. This dissertation finds that alternative break participants experience a multitude of positive outcomes, not the least of which is the creation of meaningful connections with their peers. Notably, these connections often extend beyond graduation. Though alternative breaks are not a solution to all problems affecting retention or other difficulties faced by college students, these programs do impact students in a meaningful and powerful ways. This dissertation maintains that outcomes achieved as a result of alternative breaks, particularly connections, are critical to successful collegiate experience. As such, institutions of higher education should continue to grow alternative break programs as a means to contribute to the growth and development of students. At times when many of their peers are engaging in activities

that many consider less than noble alternative break participants make conscious efforts to affect not only themselves, but the world around them, by acting as stewards of service for their home institutions; As such, these programs deserve continued institutional support.

Summary of Chapter IV

Overall, this dissertation served to fill gaps in instructional communication and service-learning (e.g., alternative break) literature. Specifically, this dissertation found that alternative breaks provide students with a powerful context in which to connect with one another. This dissertation discovered that these relationships do persist upon leaving the institution (e.g., graduation) and thus are meaningful in a broader scope than common institutional outcomes. Connections among peers in one setting however, do not always translate to integration and assimilation into the larger organization of the school. Further, alternative breaks often lead participants to a distinct perspective change that is evident long after completion of the experience. Presented with only minimal limitations, this dissertation offers practitioners and scholars alike many suggests, that are reviewed in this chapter. Overall, this dissertation holds that alternative breaks are a unique experience for students to grow, learn, and develop by forging connections among themselves and experiencing different the needs of others through service.

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Appendix A

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure Model (Tinto, 1993)

Appendix B

Team Connectedness Measure (Adaption of *Connectedness Classroom Climate**Inventory*)

Please respond on the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

“The members on my team...”

1. I had a sense of security with my team.
2. I had common ground with my teammates.
3. I felt a strong bond with my teammates. .
4. The members on my team share stories and experiences with one another
5. The members of my team were friendly with one another.
6. The members of my team respected one another
7. I felt included in team discussions.
8. The members on my team were courteous with one another.
9. The members on my team praised one another.
10. The members of my team are concerned about one another.
11. The members of my team smiled at one another.
12. The members of my team engaged in small talk with one another.
13. The members of my team were non-judgmental with one another.
14. The members of my team laughed with one another.
15. The members of my team were supportive of one another.
16. The members of my team showed interest in what one another said.
17. The members of my team cooperated with one another.
18. The members of my team felt comfortable with one another.

Appendix C

Organizational Assimilation Index

Please respond using the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

m

Familiarity with coworkers

1. I consider other university students my friends
2. I feel comfortable talking to other university students.
3. I feel like I know other university students pretty well.

Familiarity with supervisors

4. I feel like I know my instructors pretty well.
5. My instructors sometimes discuss problems with me.
6. My instructors and I talk together often.

Acculturation

7. I understand the standards of this school.
8. I think I have a good idea about how this school operates.
9. I know the values of my school.
10. I do not mind being asked to perform my work according to the school's standards

Recognition

11. My instructors recognize when I do a good job.
12. My instructors listen to my ideas.
13. I think my instructors value my opinions
14. I think my instructors recognize my value to the class.

Involvement

15. I talk to other university students about how much I like it at school.
16. I volunteer for duties that benefit the school.
17. I talk about how much I enjoy my school.

Job Competency

18. I often show other university students how to perform a task (i.e., academic or social).
19. I think I'm an expert at what I do.
20. I have figured out efficient ways to do my class work.
21. I can step up for other students, if I'm needed.

Role Negotiation

22. I have changed some aspects of my role as student.
23. I have talked to my instructors about the role I should play in the classroom.
24. I do class work a bit differently than previous students did.

Appendix D

Small Group Socialization Scale

Please respond using the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. I understood what was appropriate dress for group meetings.
2. I understood the authority the group had for doing its work.
3. I did not see myself as an effect group member.
4. I understood the “group talk” the group used to do its work.
5. I found someone in the group who could provide me with emotional support.
6. It was clear what was expected of me in this group.
7. I found someone in the group with whom I could talk about career plans.
8. It was not at all clear what was expected of me in this group.
9. I depended on other group members for support in the group.
10. I found someone in the group who could help me adjust to the group.
11. I found someone in the group whom I could depend on for support.
12. I had no clear idea what this group was to accomplish.
13. I found someone in the group with whom I could discuss personal matters.
14. There was no one in the group on whom I could depend for support.

Appendix E

Social Integration Measure

Please respond using the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

r-Group Interactions

1. Since coming to this university I have developed relationships with other students.
2. The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying.
3. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.
4. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
5. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.
6. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.
7. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.

Interactions with Faculty

8. My nonclassroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.
9. My nonclassroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
10. My nonclassroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.
11. Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.
12. I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.

Appendix F

Peer Leader Power Use Scale (Adaptation of the Teacher Power Use Scale)

Please respond using the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Coercive Power

1. The team member will be punished if he/she does not comply with peer leader requests.
2. The peer leader will ensure that something bad will happen to the team member if he/she does not comply.
3. The team member will experience negative consequences for noncompliance with peer leader requests.
4. There will be corrective discipline for noncompliance with peer leader requests.

Legitimate Power

5. The team member must comply because it is required by the peer leader.
6. The team member must comply because it is required by the department/program office.
7. The team member must comply because it is a university rule or expectation.
8. The team member must comply because the peer leader has the authority/right to direct students in this context.

Referent Power

9. The team member should comply out of his/her friendship relationship with the peer leader.
10. The team member should comply so he/she can imitate beneficial peer leader characteristics.
11. The team member should comply to please the peer leader.
12. The team member should comply so he/she can model or be like the peer leader.

Expert Power

13. The team member should comply because the peer leader has great wisdom/knowledge behind the request.
14. The peer leader is only seeking compliance because he/she knows it is in the team members best interest.
15. The peer leader is seeking compliance from the team member based on the peer leader's experience in this area.
16. The team member should comply because the peer leader has much training/skill/mastery in this area.

Reward Power

17. The team member will receive some kind of tangible or intangible reward for complying with the peer leader requests.
18. The peer leader will see to it that the team member acquires some desirable benefits if he/she does what is suggested.

19. The team member will gain short-term or long-term, from compliance with the peer leader requests.
20. If the team member complies with peer leader requests, he/she will receive some type of compensation or prize.

Appendix G

Value of Reflection Activities Measure

Please respond using the following items.

1. The reflection activities that I participated in were beneficial to my experience on alternative break.

Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agree
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2. I believe the time spent doing reflection activities was important to my alternative break experience.

Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agree
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3. My participation in reflection while on alternative break was worthless.

Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agree
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Appendix H

Presence of Lasting Relationships Measure

Please respond using the following five-point scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- formed a lasting/long-term relationship during my alternative break experience.
2. I keep in contact with people that I met through alternative break experience more than the people I met through other campus activities (e.g., student government, intramural sports).
3. I still consider someone I met through alternative break to be one of my best friends.
4. I wish that I kept in better touch with people I met through alternative break.
5. In general, I've lost touch with many people from college.
6. After the completion of my alternative break, I had limited contacted with the people from my team for the rest of my college career.
7. I've made no attempt to stay in touch with the people from my alternative break.
8. I still often contact people from my alternative break.
9. While in college, did you remain connected to the people you met through alternative break?

Appendix I

Types of Relationships

Please respond using the following scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Consider one of the other participants from my alternative break to be:

1. A best friend
2. A close/good friend
3. A friend
4. A romantic partner or spouse
5. A coworker
6. A colleague
7. An acquaintance
8. Other: _____

Appendix J

Assessment of Qualities that Lead to Lasting Relationships

Please use the space below to respond to the following questions.

1. Reflecting on the relationships you formed through alternative break, what made you want to stay connected with those individuals?
2. What role did the shared experience of alternative break play in the formation and quality of your relationship?

Appendix K

Assessment of the Impact of Alternative Break

Please use the space provided to respond to the following questions.

1. How do you feel you were impacted by your alternative break experiences in the short-term?
2. How do you feel you were impacted by your alternative break experiences in the long-term?

Appendix L

Assessment of Lasting Impact

Please respond using the following scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. Participating in alternative break has had a lasting impact on me.
2. Participation in alternative break has affected me since graduation.
3. When I think about college, I often reflect fondly upon my experience with alternative break.
4. I believe that participating in alternative break set me apart from other students.
5. Participating in alternative break gave me life experience that I was able to translate into the workforce.
6. Participating in alternative break was a terrible decision.
7. Alternative break was the best thing I did outside the classroom while in college.
8. The values espoused on the trip still impact me today.

Appendix M

Meaningful Aspects of Alternative Break

Please respond using the space provided.

1. What is the most meaningful aspect of alternative break?