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Alternative Spring Break has students trading swimsuits for work gloves

Rather than working on their tans this spring break, about 40 Northern Arizona University students will be working to rebuild a Mississippi county devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

From March 18-25, students participating in NAU's "Alternative Spring Break" will travel by bus to Hancock County, Miss., where they will work 8 to 10 hours a day gutting houses and salvaging the personal belongings of the people who had to abandon their homes during the storm that filled the area with 30-foot of water and damaged 90 percent of its residences.



Ann Halbach, leadership coordinator of Associated Students of Northern Arizona University, is coordinating an Alternative Spring Break to Hancock County, Miss.

"I just wanted to do something to help," said **Ann Halbach**, leadership coordinator of Associated Students of Northern Arizona University and organizer of the trip. Inspired by learning about similar projects, Halbach decided to try coordinating one for NAU. "When I'm 80 years old and my grandkids ask me how I helped during those horrible hurricanes I don't want to say I didn't do anything. I wanted to make a difference."

Halbach got in touch with Community Collaborations International, a national non-profit agency that organizes aid efforts world wide.

"We provide the tools and the materials and the students hit the ground running," said Steven Boisvert, a coordinator with Community Collaborations. "We took the brunt of the storm and although there is no environmental damage, we sure need a lot of help."

Students will be housed at the organization's "I Care Village," which Halbach calls a "safe" base camp with electricity, running water, modern communications and access to a medical facility. Throughout the month of March more than 600 students from 60 colleges will be staying at the village to help the residents of Hancock County.

Those participating in NAU's Alternative Spring Break are getting some financial assistance from the university, but are continuing to raise funds to help pay for the trip. The NAU President's Fund for Excellence has provided \$5,000 and about \$2,500 has been raised in donations from the community. Halbach said about \$24,000 is still needed.

"I am very impressed with the leadership of Ann Halbach and ASNAU in organizing this project," said **Molly Williams**, vice president of University Advancement. "Our students are embracing what makes a democracy successful—the inclusion of volunteerism. We talk about

How to Help

With help from residence halls, college deans, and the NAU Foundation, Alternative Spring Break students are well on their way to Mississippi, but funds are still needed to raise money to cover travel, room and meal costs. Donations can go to the NAU Foundation Spring Break for Katrina Fund by calling the NAU Foundation office at (928) 523-2012, sending checks to PO Box 4086, Flagstaff, AZ 86011, or [click here](#) to donate online.

civic responsibility and good citizenship on campus and here is a good example of our students embracing that concept and doing something."

Halbach already sees the rewards of her efforts. "It's what we'll be able to bring back from the experience that makes it so special," she said. "I'm hoping we set a precedence for more NAU students to choose to do a good thing."

The deadline for the Wednesday newsletter is Monday at 5 p.m. [Click here](#) to submit your story ideas.