Reflections on Leading an Alternative Spring Break Trip

Presenters:
Anna Gardner ‘19
Thomas McAuliffe ‘19

Sponsor:
Donald Austin, Assistant Director of Community Service in the Office of Student Engagement and Multicultural Affairs

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) is a volunteer program offered through the Office of Student Engagement and Multicultural Affairs during the spring semester of each academic year. Students participate in a variety of direct service projects related to specific themes, including food justice, poverty alleviation, women’s rights, coastal studies, and environmental conservation. One student is selected to serve as a participant-leader for each of the five trips. Each participant-leader assumes the responsibility of helping to prepare their groups for the experience and to provide leadership while on the trip. Since incorporating this position into the ASB program in 2014, this has proven to be a major contributing factor to the increased quality of the program since that time. Participant leaders form better channels of communication with the students on their trip, which leads to a better understanding of the program and what to anticipate from the experience. In addition, participant-leaders offer peer-to-peer leadership during ASB reflection sessions, which occur regularly throughout the trips. With reflection being such a critical piece of processing the service immersion experience, we have found that transferring this responsibility to participant-leaders has resulted in an increase in quality of these reflections. In addition, serving as an ASB participant-leader has given the students greater leadership development opportunities, including program planning and coordination, group facilitation skills, and strategies for troubleshooting. Finally, presenters will reflect on personal takeaways from their experience leading an ASB trip in 2017, and why this is an effective means to gain and hone leadership competencies as a student at Ithaca College.