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Campus Compact *for New Hampshire*

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From Next Door to Nicaragua, Communities Benefit from Student Work during Alternative Spring Breaks

More than 530 students from New Hampshire colleges and universities worked to build affordable housing, teach children, and protect the environment during the March break.

Concord, NH, April 3, 2012—While many of their peers headed south for vacations in the sun, hundreds of students from New Hampshire colleges and universities chose to work on community projects rather than their tans over the March school break. In all, 537 students participated in 48 alternative spring break projects within New Hampshire, across the United States, and abroad. Students working with dozens of national and local community organizations chose projects where one week of sustained effort would make a lasting difference.

The trips, organized by students with the aid of faculty and staff on their campuses, focused on areas ranging from housing construction to tutoring. More than 20 trips were arranged to address housing needs, with students repairing or building affordable housing in locations as diverse as North Carolina, Ohio, and Costa Rica. Other trips focused on teaching and mentoring children, working with national parks and groups like The Nature Conservancy on environmental stewardship, and providing services to the homeless and others in need.

“The Alternative Spring Break project working for Habitat for Humanity was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life,” says Hattie Cadreact of NHTI, Concord’s Community College, who organized a trip to Wichita Falls in Texas to build houses for families in need. “I never once looked at it as giving up my vacation; I viewed it as a lifelong lesson on the importance of helping those in need and building a strong community.”

One group of students from Saint Anselm College stayed close to home, offering outreach and services to refugees in Manchester. Students from Dartmouth College tutored migrant workers in Florida. Southern New Hampshire University students worked with organizations in the DC area to provide education and food security. A group from Manchester Community College set up medical clinics in the Dominican Republic, while New England College students taught English to children in Nicaragua. Students from Chester College of New England, Franklin Pierce

University, Keene State College, NHTI, Concord's Community College, Plymouth State University, and the University of New Hampshire worked with Habitat for Humanity and other housing groups on building projects in a dozen states. Other groups worked on education programs for disabled children, Native Americans, and inner-city youth.

Alternative spring breaks have gained popularity over the past two decades as college students have become more active in community work and as campuses have created support structures for such work. Alternative breaks differ from other types of service trips in that they usually are student-led, involve extensive preparation, and are designed for maximum impact both on students and on the communities they serve. One study on the effectiveness of alternative breaks found that 100% of participating nonprofits benefited from the experience. Additional research has shown that students who take part in these trips are afterwards more likely to vote, volunteer, and participate in other forms of civic engagement.

Cadreact highlights the lasting impact of this work on college students as well as on the community, noting that "the value of the friendships we formed while working toward a greater cause" helped them establish their own sense of community and cemented an enduring commitment to working for positive change. Cadreact has earned national honors for her community work and was recently named a Newman Civic Fellow by Campus Compact, a national higher education association that promotes campus-based civic engagement.

Students participating in spring break trips from New Hampshire this year represented 11 colleges and universities, some of which sent students to a dozen different locations to work on a wide range of projects. All of these schools are members of Campus Compact for New Hampshire, a statewide coalition of college and university presidents who are committed to making community and civic engagement part of campus life. Of the 48 alterative break projects conducted in March, 43 of them were student-led.

"We've seen an incredible number of alternative spring break trips this year, which is not surprising given the level of commitment among our member campuses and their students," says Debby Scire, Executive Director of Campus Compact for New Hampshire. "But even more important than the quantity of work is the focus on quality. The thought and planning that went into these projects demonstrate that New Hampshire's college students are ready and willing to take on leadership roles in tackling tough social issues."

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About Campus Compact for New Hampshire

Campus Compact for New Hampshire (CCNH) is a statewide consortium of college and university presidents and private-sector partners who are united in their commitment to the civic purposes of higher education. As part of a national coalition of college and university leaders, CCNH serves as a catalyst to integrate community service and civic responsibility throughout academic and student life. CCNH is part of the national Campus Compact organization, which encompasses more than 1,100 college and university presidents representing some 6 million students. For more information, see http://www.compactnh.org/.