

## WSU students taking 'Alternative Spring Break' helping youth

SAN FRANCISCO — A group of 31 Weber State University students are leaving their hearts, sweat and volunteer service hours in San Francisco.

This week, the group of WSU students, along with two advisers, are performing community outreach for disadvantaged youths living in the San Francisco area, all as part of what they call their “Alternative Spring Break.”

On Monday, the group worked in Pleasant Hills — 45 minutes out of San Francisco — helping a youth organization known as Southwest Key paint a mural on the cafeteria wall of their group home.

During the week, each student will perform nine hours of service work per day, 45 hours for the trip, in providing outreach to a wide array of youth groups affected by poverty, migration, environment and sickness, said Mike Moon, assistant director of the WSU Community Involvement Center.

“Rather than going to a beach and partying, these students are trying to effect change in communities,” Moon said. The group will work on breaking down stereotypes.

San Francisco was selected by group leaders because of its diverse population, Moon said, and because it offers the group some interesting sites to visit in their off hours.

“The intent is that they learn about the issues and populations, and bring that (knowledge) back to the Ogden community,” he said. “They remember these experiences.”

Moon said these learning experiences complement the book knowledge the students are receiving in the classroom.

To remember the event, each student has a journal. They write down their thoughts at the beginning and end of each day, giving themselves words to reflect on later.

On Friday, the last day of work, the group will gather at Stanford University and recap with university officials what they accomplished and learned during their service, Moon said.

“We are hoping the students will have their eyes open to diversity,” said Heather Gray, WSU student leader and Alternative Spring Break chairwoman.

Gray said her hope is that the experience will broaden the students’ horizons by giving them a chance to work with groups that often are stereotyped.

“Every single one of them is willing to help in any way,” Gray said of the WSU group, consisting of nine men and 24 women ranging from freshman to seniors.

“They are collaborating well together. We have a really good group of people,” she said.

WSU has been offering the Alternative Spring Break activity for at least five years.

The cost for each student to participate in the weeklong venture was \$375, which included transportation, lodging and some meals, Moon said.

To reduce travel expenses, the group drove to San Francisco by squeezing into two large university cargo vans.

The group is saving further costs by staying overnight at the Fisherman’s Wharf hostel in San Francisco.

One female student body leader described their lodging and traveling conditions as “cozy.”