

ASB: A Unique Opportunity for Illinois Tech Staff

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As a student, staff member, or faculty member of Illinois Tech, you have probably at some point been asked by some friendly students on the MTCC bridge if you would donate to ASB by purchasing some item for a fundraiser. ASB is more than just an organization looking for money. ASB is short for Alternative Spring Break, and it is a student organization on campus that partners with Habitat for Humanity, participating in this non-profit, international organization's Collegiate Challenge spring break build. Each spring break, an extremely dedicated and passionate group of students, accompanied by a few staff and faculty members of Illinois Tech, spends that week in March volunteering and serving a community in the United States by helping Habitat for Humanity build homes—building homes and lifting dreams. When you give ASB money, you are donating to an amazing cause and sponsoring an amazing team, of which each member has gone through a rigorous application process to earn his or her spot and put in a lot of time throughout the year leading up to spring break.

Currently, Alternative Spring Break has their faculty and staff application open to any faculty or staff member who might be interested in being a part of the team for 2016-17. It might be helpful to hear from former ASB staff members about their experiences with Alternative Spring Break. Three previous ASB staff members were interviewed: Beth Conry, English Language Instructor in the English Language Services portion of the School of Applied Technology; Alexa Schutz, Assistant Director of Graduate Admission; and Joshua Marjenka, the current Housing Assignments Coordinator in Residence Life at Loyola University Chicago, and previously Operations Manager in Residence and Greek Life at Illinois Tech.

Beth Conry participated with ASB 2015-16, at first simply as a staff member, but she was quickly promoted to primary staff advisor when the position became vacant. Conry had ASB “on [her] radar the year before around trip time,” and when she saw the student application advertisement on IIT Today in Fall 2015, she talked to Alexa Schutz, who recommended that Conry absolutely should apply when the staff application soon became open. Schutz recalls that she “actually recommended Beth Conry to the organization [of ASB] and later that year she became the staff advisor and caught the ASB bug.” Conry truly felt it was “great to participate with students, and nice to work with more of the student population on a different level.” In her role at Illinois Tech, she sometimes feels segregated to working with mostly international students, so ASB gave her the opportunity to extend her interaction with more of the rest of the Illinois Tech student body. She also remembers how it was “nice to see the exec. board, watching [them] grow and learn, and just the process—the planning was well executed.” Witnessing those “ah ha moments” was a highlight for Conry,

in addition to seeing “students realize how to make a difference in the world,” since ASB allows students to help others while allowing staff members “to help not only students, but to help others” as well. For Conry, the most rewarding part of being an ASB staff member and advisor was “just working with everybody together.”

Alexa Schutz was a staff member for ASB 2013-14, and the organization's primary staff advisor for 2014-15. Through IIT Today, Schutz saw multiple fundraisers posted for ASB, which she soon discovered was associated with the larger organization of Habitat for Humanity. Since working with Habitat for Humanity was something she had always been interested in, she “randomly emailed the student organization on a Monday morning after seeing a post for a fundraiser to see if [she] could get involved in the future.” Although spring break was only a month away, ASB was down a staff member and driver, so Schutz was contacted, interviewed, and confirmed to be accepted to the team by that Thursday. This was the “best email [she] ever sent!” Since Schutz works in an administrative office on campus, she does not “get to personally interact very much with students, largely as the students [she is] mostly communicating with are international students applying to IIT.” Also, since Schutz is interested in working in higher education, “exposure to undergraduate students brings [her] much joy—their enthusiasm, positivity, drive, and creativity is infectious to be around.” Then, “after meeting the students from the 2014 trip, [she] fell in love with the student organization and how amazing every single student was.” She even goes so far as to refer to ASB as her “little family of undergrads,” holding ASB very close to her heart. When asked why she kept coming back to work with ASB, Schutz reflected that “having that one-on-one time with students who are giving their time and energy to do good and serve others is by far what keeps [her] coming back.” However, for Schutz “the most rewarding part of ASB is watching the students grow and develop along with making long-lasting friendships. Over the years, [she] has seen students break out of their shell and blossom after this experience.” She has also witnessed students “make mistakes and later grow from them and share that knowledge with next year's trip.” Finally, “seeing students work together for the common good to help address a societal issue is very touching” for Schutz.

Joshua Marjenka was a staff member on ASB trips in the spring of 2013, 2014, and 2015. He first found out about Alternative Spring Break through his former supervisor at Illinois Tech, Betsi Pinkus-Huizenga, when she was ASB's primary staff advisor. Many resident advisors he worked with also told him about the organization. Marjenka “kept coming back to ASB because [he] loved the experience of spending time with students giving back to individuals and communities through service and engagement.” Although he expected that helping people in the communities would be the most rewarding part about working with

ASB, he soon found this initial expectation overturned. Even though “that aspect of the experience was rewarding, the best part of ASB was being able to see student leaders develop over the course of a week, a year, and/or several ASB experiences.”

Conry, Schutz, and Marjenka would all strongly recommend other Illinois Tech staff and faculty members to apply to become a part of ASB. Conry “most definitely” believes that ASB is a “nice outlet for like-minded people to come together for one and a half semesters to make something happen.” The “shared experience” of working so closely with a group of dedicated, hard-working students was really “a great experience” for Conry. The trip provides staff members the ability to watch “students see more possibilities, more opportunities, within the university, the city, and life in general.” Additionally, since Alternative Spring Break is a student-led organization, Conry feels it is “good for people who are usually in charge,” since these staff and faculty members have to adjust to become more like “facilitators.” Conry also “really liked that [the team] didn't know exactly what [they] were coming to in North Carolina, and watching the students deal with that”—the flexibility that the students needed to exercise was phenomenal. For Schutz, she would “absolutely, without a doubt, recommend ASB to any staff or faculty member, especially for those who are seeking to connect with students” on a much more personal level. Since she had only been an Illinois Tech staff member for six months when she first travelled with ASB, Schutz understands that “for new staff or faculty members to IIT, [ASB] will perhaps be the most valuable experience you have with your university in the friendships—yes, friendships—you can make with these amazing students.” Staff and faculty members who become a part of ASB “have the opportunity to get to know [ASB students] and learn from them about their experience as a student while simultaneously seeing them grow as a person.” Even after the year of ASB is over, you won't be able to “walk around campus without bumping into an ASB student and their friendly wave and smile will always brighten your day on the way to a meeting!” It is hard to put the ASB experience into words, but Schutz knows “there is something truly special about this organization!” Marjenka simply reinforces everything already mentioned by Conry and Schutz. He was able to distill the experience into one simple statement of recommendation that “Illinois Tech staff should strongly consider applying to take part in an ASB experience because it is an unparalleled way to engage with students, foster life-long relationships with and between students, and the experience creates a meaningful positive impact on the world and on you.”

If Conry could provide any advice to staff and faculty members of Illinois Tech, she would “encourage staff and faculty to become more involved on campus, just like [she] tells students, since it is just going to enhance your experience.” Through the “shared experience” of ASB, a “friendlier atmosphere” is created

within the university, and staff and faculty are able to connect more with other staff and faculty, as well as with students (with whom that kind of contact is not very common). In this way, ASB succeeds in providing a “more fulfilling work experience.”

If Schutz could provide any advice to staff and faculty members, “whether you have thought about joining a student organization or not,” there is no need to look further than “to the best group of IIT students you could ever ask to work and volunteer alongside.” If you absolutely cannot get the time off over spring break to join the group, then she says to “be sure to support their fundraisers,” since she “truly cannot speak more highly” of ASB. You are not expected as a staff member to exercise a significant amount of responsibility throughout the Alternative Spring Break trip, since “ASB executive members take the lead on the organization, logistics, and fundraising, so you are simply along for their ride by providing any needed advice, support, and guidance.”

If Marjenka could provide any advice to all members of the Illinois Tech community, he recommends applying to ASB: “If you're thinking about applying for ASB but you're not sure, APPLY! If you're not thinking about applying for ASB at all, APPLY!” He understands that ASB provides a “unique opportunity,” allowing Illinois Tech community members “to go out into the world with people of different backgrounds, experiences, and expectations, but who share a common goal to serve equally diverse individuals and communities.” During your participation on the ASB team, “you will gain knowledge, experience, understanding, friendships, and a deeper appreciation for the world around you.” Although the ASB trip is merely a week long, “the impact of ASB will last many lifetimes (considering each participant and each person [they] serve).” Even though Marjenka is no longer at Illinois Tech, he still holds IIT ASB close to his heart as he works with the students of Loyola University Chicago. This spring, he will be leading a group of first-year students at Loyola on an Alternative Break Immersion trip and experience to Tennessee. Marjenka knows he “will carry the lessons and memories of #IITASB with [him] as [he observes] the development of this new group of leaders.”

The staff and faculty member application to ASB 2016-17 will be open until 11:59p.m. on Saturday, October 22. The link to the application is <http://bit.ly/2dtjDDE>. Further information and visual representations of the ASB experience are available at the same application link. If any questions, comments, or concerns happen to arise, please do not hesitate to contact ASB directly at asb.iit@gmail.com. The Alternative Spring Break team of 2016-17 looks forward to working with staff, faculty, and students as fellow team members and generous financial sponsors as they prepare for their spring break experience serving communities with Habitat for Humanity in the spring of 2017.

Local legislators and students gather to launch tuition-free college campaign

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Tuition free college is within reach, lawmakers and activists say.

On Friday, October 14, over a hundred activists, leaders, and students gathered on the south end of the University of Illinois at Chicago's campus to launch a statewide campaign for free publicly funded college and university education. The campaign is being organized by Will Guzzardi, an incumbent Illinois State Representative who is currently running for his second term in office. The audience was made up almost entirely of people who are involved in political activism. The master of ceremonies, Erica Nanton, laid the goals of this campaign out plainly: “We want funding for MAP grants, access for undocumented citizens to grants and scholarships, and free access to higher education in Illinois.”

This political campaign is unlike most that people are familiar with, in that it isn't an individual's campaign for election, but rather a campaign to spread an idea. Germinating in the offices and among the constituencies of Guzzardi, this campaign is being proudly backed by several large groups in the Chicago political landscape, including Chicago Student Action, a branch of The People's Lobby.

The People's Lobby is one of the largest organizations in Chicago politics and has successfully passed statewide legislation and helped elect officials affiliated with the group. Other groups that were represented at the event included Chicago Votes, Young Chicago Authors, Illinois College Democrats, and the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans. Illinois Tech was modestly represented at the launch event, having about a dozen people in attendance and one on the speaking lineup. Esau Chavez, a

current student, gave a speech speaking to his experience with the financial burdens of college, having attended Richard J. Daley College for two years before transferring to Illinois Tech. He also focused on the lack of resources allotted to city colleges.

Sanjin Ibrahimovic, an Illinois Tech third year student who is involved with Chicago Student Action, attended the event. When asked why he thought this campaign was important, he said, “When I imagine a more educated society, I imagine a more creative, aspiring, and collaborative society... We need as many minds as possible to solve the problems at hand - like climate change.”

Interestingly, this launch event featured more than incendiary rhetoric and electrifying speeches. About 20 minutes into the event, Nanton said that for her, “political events don't feel powerful until there is art involved.” During the course of the night, Nanton introduced two artists, a

vocalist and a poet, to perform. The vocalist, Daryn, sang a personal ballad recounting her struggles with college debt. The poet, Antwon Funches, performed a poem that directly attacked disenfranchised populations for further disenfranchising subsets of their own population. Funches, himself an African-American, finished with the line “I'm sick of Black Lives Matter. All Black Lives Matter.”

It is worth noting that the campaign will face harsh opposition from people on the right of the aisle and conservative Democrats alike. This is due to the plan for funding relying on three options for revenue streams: a progressive income tax, a transaction tax, or a surcharge on incomes over one million dollars.

More information regarding the campaign can be found at its website, tuitionfreeillinois.org.