I would first like to thank the Office of Student Volunteerism for the Alternative Spring Break opportunity. My spring break was unforgettable for a multitude of reasons and I would have not have had the opportunity without the OSV. The day we departed from Dallas, all of us were nervous, yet excited for the trip that we had been planning for months beforehand. Even though we had met frequently in order to minimize the likelihood of problems on the trip, nothing had prepared us for the emotional and eye-opening rollercoaster that we were about to experience.

When we landed in Salina, we were shocked by two things. One of which being the weather, which was the complete opposite of Dallas’s warm and sunny conditions. The second was how different Salina was from Dallas. Although it was smaller in size, it felt like a home away from home because the people from the Ashby house and the community were so kind and welcoming.

Throughout the week, we did tasks that we never thought we would have the opportunity to do. We traded our textbooks for paintbrushes, our laptops and phones for sandpaper, and our pencils for screwdrivers and pliers. We spent the week painting the ceiling, sanding and plastering walls, varnishing cabinets, and unhinging doors. The hammers, paintbrushes, and screwdrivers were not just tools for repairing, but also for bonding. We strengthened our friendships through little tasks such as cooking meals together and reflecting during breakfast and dinner. Team work was integral to our ability to effectively complete the task of renovating the kitchen and we depended on each other throughout the week in order to get the job done. We left Dallas as acquaintances, only knowing each other’s names and food preferences, and came back from Salina as sisters.

Meeting with the Ashby house clients and staff opened our eyes to the realization of how fortunate our lives are. Perspective makes a world of a difference, especially when compared to the severe times that the Ashby women have gone through. The student life that we often complain about being stressful is a blessing in comparison to what many of these women have endured. A vicious cycle of a difficult childhood, sexual and physical abuse, as well as drug addictions was common among all the women that we talked to. It was inspiring to see the strength of the Ashby women and even though they had fallen into dark times, they managed to turn their life around for the better. With perseverance and assistance, they were able to escape their life revolving around drugs in order to become better mothers for their children and lead happier lives. Being aware of other’s struggles opened our eyes to the fact that there is always someone who requires help and that volunteering is critical in order to change another person’s life for the better.
Even though the trip was service oriented, it felt like a vacation because we were able to get away from the bubble of student life. It is so easy to get caught up in the daily routine of studying and attending class that we often forget that there is more to life than lecture halls, the library, and textbooks. The kitchen that we helped remodel was one day going to be used in order to help women who have gone through difficult times heal. We left Salina, Kansas with new perspectives, our hearts full of happy memories, and a new eagerness to continue our volunteer journey back in Dallas.