It was the first pre-trip meeting. I walked into a room full of strangers and walked out knowing at least their names. The group of 6 didn’t talk very much!

It was trip day. As we got off the plane there was so much chatter. I guess confinement on a plane really gets you acquainted with your neighbors. We all plied into a car and pointed and talked excitedly as we passed cacti. Something changed in that moment. All the nervousness was replaced with eagerness to explore Arizona, to learn about fellow ASBers, and to serve the community.

About 30 min later we pulled up to our temporary home for the week. None of us were expecting to see a beautiful church nestled in the heart of North Mountain. As an added bonus, there was a great hiking trail in our back yard. That’s when we first bonded. We all loved hiking!

Then we remembered why we were actually in Phoenix. The trip we went on was for Alternative Spring Break (ASB). ASB is offered at UTD as an opportunity for us to serve the community. Our service project was the Education Project at Junior Achievement’s Biz Town. Junior achievement is an organization that teaches students all about financial literacy.

I remember thinking to myself, ‘What do I know about financial literacy?’ I didn’t know what to expect but when I got there I was handed a name tag that said “Suhasini Sundar: AmTrust Bank.” The door opened and I saw the coolest small scale town ever. There were real businesses like Toyota, Papa Johns, AmTrust Bank, Law offices, and even a Radio and TV station. The best part was that it was all managed by the townspeople (little 4th and 5th graders). As ASB volunteers we were in charge of helping them manage their businesses.

The 4th and 5th grade CEOs, CFOs, Senior Tellers, and tellers walked into to the bank for their job and looked as confused as ever. The first task was to apply for a loan (with interest) and visit the law office to get it approved. After that, the bank was ready to operate. As the paychecks came in from other businesses, AmTrust’s CEO endorsed the checks and handed them to the senior teller. During each break employees from other businesses came to the bank with smiles on their faces and checkbooks in their hands. It was time to collect their pay. Each business’ goal was to pay off their loans and turn a profit. All in all, the simulation was realistic.

We went back to BizTown for one more day. That night we prepared our lesson plans in teams. The next day we would be teachers at Park Meadows Elementary.

With a lesson plans in hand Rachel, Vivien, and I walked into the classroom. The kindergarteners were at risk youth. Children whose parents were in prison, poor, or both. This is why financial literacy was so important here. We taught concepts like saving versus spending,
wants versus needs, and goods versus services. The kids picked up on the concepts quickly. I stood in front of class singing, reading, and laughing. These kids learned so much in such a short period and were grateful that we were there to teach them. At the end of the second day of teaching the kids ran up to us and hugged our legs. As we left we heard more thank yous and I’ll miss yous than we could count. They even made us a beautiful card.

I’ve had the most rewarding spring break ever. At the end of each day I felt like I actually made a difference. Remember those strangers from the beginning of the trip? They turned into people I enjoy talking to and laughing with. They turned into friends over the course of the week. So I’ll take this moment to thank UTD for ASB.