



## Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christian Graduate Students on Campus

Written by Nancy Pedulla

(to be read in conjunction with [Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christian Students on Campus](#))

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In graduate student ministry, finding students who are called by God to invest in the mission on campus is essential. Not all missional graduate students will be available to devote their time and energy to planting and building InterVarsity chapters on campus at any given time. In order to have a thriving campus community, GFM staff must invest intentionally in locating missional graduate students who will commit themselves to developing flourishing communities on campus which will serve many others and carry the word of God to others.

InterVarsity staff work requires balancing the tasks of discipling students and building witnessing communities. Optimally a lot of our work takes place as these two intersect. Because of the time challenges and transitions graduate students face, GFM staff will often need to help students become grounded in their understanding of their calling before inviting them to be part of the IV missional core on campus. Asking too soon is likely to result in having students who are not prepared in the core. GFM work requires learning the art of balancing these without reducing the call to Kingdom orientation for the students. When handled appropriately, a call to serve as a missional IV graduate student while on campus is part of the call to serve Christ for a lifetime in professional or academic life. Involvement should provide training and experience not just for graduate school, but for a lifetime of service and investment in the arena of work.

The document [Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christian Students on Campus](#) defines a missional Christian as:

*a student or faculty who is motivated by their relationship with Jesus to advance the gospel on their campus, someone who is willing to devote time, resources and take risks for Jesus' sake, to engage with cynics and seekers in order that they might be moved to belief.*

Graduate students by definition are young adults in a different life stage and a different environment than undergraduates.

- They tend to be more engaged in their local churches, often attending small groups and participating in other activities in their congregations.
- Graduate students are typically in a stage of faith development which is about developing independence rather than following an authority figure.
- Graduate students, (especially PhD students) are in a daily environment more like their first professional job than the university public square. They are being inculcated into the epistemology, methodology, philosophy and people networks of their profession.
- Graduate students often have academic demands which dominate their schedules, seemingly precluding adequate self care, relationships, time with God, etc.
- Christian graduate students are either finding ways to integrate their studies and professional life with their beliefs or beginning to separate their public and private lives.

As graduate students negotiate these factors, it may appear that there are fewer missional graduate students available. God will bring these individuals as we pray, learn to cultivate student leadership and vision and encourage students to grow in their understanding of their own calling.

The [Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christian Students on Campus](#) document suggests that we are looking for students who:

- *Show up. They are attracted to what we are doing and like the fact that there is a new risk to take that has a great purpose behind it.*
- *Are eager to see something happen that isn't currently happening on campus. They may not understand what it is we are trying to achieve but they understand enough to engage with us in reaching out to parts of the campus we had never impacted.*
- *Are willing to make accommodations in their lives to see something develop. They rearrange their schedule, are available and make some sacrifices to see meetings take place and the work get done.*
- *Want more in their relationship with God and want it for those around them even if they aren't sure how it will be done.*
- *Are able to engage with others and seek to have an influence on them. It's not just that they are smooth relationally, but they make significant connections.*
- *Take risks. The level of risk looks different with different people, but students who are missional demonstrate that they're willing to step out beyond their comfort zone for the sake of this movement they have joined.*
- *Are teachable and are willing to learn and contribute ideas of their own.*
- *Can and do gather others around them.*
- *Aren't afraid to stand out in some way in public as followers of Jesus.*

A missional graduate student does not always look like a missional undergraduate student, though the underlying qualities we are looking for are the same, with a few additions. Missional graduate students additionally are often those who:

- Are aware of the culture of graduate schools in the university and have sensitivity to the need to be a witness within that culture.
- Understand that there is a relationship between their studies and work and God's redemption in the world.

Often identifying missional grad students, cultivating a vision for missional activity on campus or helping students to where they are called to invest in God's mission takes longer. However, graduate students are older and often bring more maturity and wisdom when they do get involved.

- Demographically graduate students are divided by discipline. We need to look for people who are respected among their peers and colleagues and not assume that they will be those who are most readily identified as leaders in a more diverse social setting.
- A missional graduate student may be more motivated or called to focus on advancing the gospel within their department or professional field, or through outreach activities in their local church or neighborhood.
- A missional graduate student may not currently have time to devote to fellowship activities, despite having an interest.
- A missional graduate student may be faced with higher risks and challenges when engaging with others within schools and departments, their daily arena of work and interaction.
- A missional graduate student may be a reluctant leader with limited experience who needs to develop social or leadership skills to be effective.

While we need to be respectful of the challenges and transitions for graduate students, we must invite them to live as Kingdom people in the midst of graduate school and for the rest of their professional life. Often this is their first encounter with the challenge of living for Christ in a context where they will be set apart for their beliefs. Our invitation to them to invest in Kingdom work on campus should always be seated within the invitation to put Christ first. We must understand that putting Christ first will mean saying no to more involvement with InterVarsity for some. But many will find that reshaping their understanding of God's purposes for their graduate years and

engaging with God's missional work on campus is a critical antidote for some of the challenges graduates face. We should never minimize the cost of discipleship or the call to put Christ first.

### **Helping Students to Consider their Call to Mission with InterVarsity**

Often missional graduate students will develop as a result of our call for them to embrace the gospel in their new environment. The following are some key activities for staff to encourage students to explore their call to InterVarsity's mission on campus.

- Get to know incoming students and identify those with a heart for God and his work. Offer activities for incoming grads which introduce them theologically and practically to God's mission on campus and in the workplace and an understanding of their calling to be Christ's ambassadors wherever they are for the rest of their career. Help them to understand the role of the Christian community in evangelism and integration. Invite them to consider being missional Christians in relation to the InterVarsity campus community as a part of their growth during their graduate student years.
- Support first semester students as they make the transition to graduate school. Invite them often. Share the vision regularly. Re-invite them at the end of the first semester when they have found their footing. Once they are attending, offer them opportunities to get involved and to invite their colleagues. Help them see the critical role of the community on campus and the need for missional students.
- Share with frequency a clear rationale for involvement in Christian community in the workplace as well as the church. Call students to be long term missional leaders in their professions. Treat the InterVarsity community as a training ground for a lifetime in community and witness. Encourage graduate students to see themselves as ambassadors, leaders and influencers within their professions and on campus. While some will not perceive themselves as leaders, they may see things differently when asked how God wants to use them within an academic group or professional group.
- Speak out against idolatry of work, power or success and fear of failure which can eliminate time for community and relationships with colleagues. Encourage students who are struggling to engage with God, community and witness. Prospective missional students who are struggling with these things will become more available to God as they are addressed.
- Be aware of the culture, challenges and opportunities students face in relation to their departments, advisors and colleagues. Teach them strategies for engaging within their departments. Help missional students to develop outreach activities which are compelling and responsible within the university context so that more students are willing to consider becoming missional leaders.
- Share your vision for the mission on campus often. Since graduate students are adults, they will want to shape the chapter vision directly. Often one-on-one meetings are a great venue for sharing your vision and sowing seeds for change. Good questions may be more useful for conveying vision with some students than exposition.
- Help students identify their gifts and how they are expressed in their new context. Cultivate a community which names and appreciates others' gifts and invites students to use their gifts actively on campus and in the community.

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[Recognizing and Awakening Missional Christian Graduate Students on Campus](#) is posted on the [Collegiate Ministries website](#) with related resources for InterVarsity staff and student leaders.