



Case Study: Where to Plant a Chapter?

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I was hired a year ago, in spring 2005, with the intention of spending a year at Susquehanna University (PA) and then going to plant a new chapter. There are about 25 schools in our area without an InterVarsity chapter, and my area team and I entered into a lengthy process to discern where to send me after my year at Susquehanna. This is the story of how we choose the campus I will be working at next year.

Each of us on our area staff team researched three or four schools from the 25 we identified without an InterVarsity group. We visited the campuses, talked to a few students, and gathered some basic statistics.

In December, at a weekend retreat, we sorted the schools into piles labeled "yes," "no," and "maybe." We made our decisions based mostly on how open the campus and students seemed, how well our ministry would reach students, and our gut instinct on what God seemed to be saying. For example, there were several schools where students never stayed on the weekends and there didn't seem to be any communal areas on campus. We were much less excited about those schools than the ones where students were open and available, thus increasing our chances of reaching lots of students. Here are some other factors that influenced our decisions:

- Some of our "maybe" schools were ones we didn't feel ready to go to yet, but if we went to a campus nearby, we would be interested in planting in a few years. This was particularly true of some of the Penn State satellite campuses.
- Most schools in our area do not have many students of color, so that was definitely a factor we paid attention to.
- We analyzed the other opportunities on campus for pursuing faith; we didn't want to go to a school where an existing ministry was already doing the exact things we would offer.
- We gave extra weight to schools that did not have any kind of protestant fellowship since we really want all students to at least have the opportunity to encounter Jesus.

After this process, our discussion was not specifically about where to send me, but rather to identify the next few schools we'd like to expand to in the hopes of having several planters in the coming years in our area.

By the end of the retreat we chose the schools we wanted to pursue: Penn State (main campus), Bloomsburg, Lafayette, and Moravian. Because of Penn State's size and complexity, we had already decided not to send me there by myself. If other planters in the region would go, I would consider joining them. However, the other planters decided to go elsewhere, so Penn State was off the table.

Later, when talking with my supervisors, we felt that Moravian was not a good fit for me. I can't remember why, but I trust we were hearing from God. Also, Moravian's administration had a history of not being open to campus fellowships.

This left me with two choices: Lafayette, a small private school in a small city, and Bloomsburg, a public university in a rural setting. I spent a day at each campus, hoping that God would really direct my heart to one of them.

My day at Lafayette was not so good. I had a friend whose brothers attended there, but they never agreed to eat lunch with me. I tried talking to a few students, but didn't get anywhere in conversation.

However, my Bloomsburg visit was great. I took a campus tour and discovered that my tour guide attended church with good family friends of mine. She was excited to talk and gave me lots of info about the campus and the religious tone. I had another really good conversation and just generally enjoyed being on campus. I had asked God to make it clear and I feel that he did. As I was making the final decision I realized that I would rather walk onto Bloomsburg's campus any day rather than Lafayette's.

So it's off to Bloomsburg for me!

Another important ingredient is that, throughout the year, I've had a prayer team of five donors praying specifically for the discernment process. It's definitely been a blessing. They're still praying since I'm just getting ready to approach Bloomsburg's administration. I'm eager to see what the Lord has in store for the students on this campus.

Case Study Questions:

1. *What were the factors the staff team used for determining which chapters to plant?*
2. *What underlying values do the staff team seem to hold? What similar or different values do you and your team hold?*
3. *What steps were taken in choosing where Betsy would serve best?*
4. *What roles do objective characteristics of a campus and subjective impressions of a campus visit play in helping Betsy determine where she fits best?*
5. *What roles do donors, prayer and other circumstances seem to play in helping Betsy feel comfortable in deciding on Bloomsburg?*
6. *Do any parts of this case study create tension or disagreement for you? Which parts? Why?*

[Case Study: Where to Plant a Chapter?](#) is posted on the [Collegiate Ministries website](#) with related resources for InterVarsity staff and student leaders.