



Chapter Planting in the Graduate Student and Faculty Ministry Context

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Graduate student, professional student and faculty ministries present some unique challenges to planting new fellowships. However, we believe that the current chapter planting model is applicable in these contexts. There are four distinct groups of people to consider when planting in the GFM context:

- Ph.D. programs in Arts, Science and Engineering (3-8 years)
- Masters programs (1-2) years
- Professionals Programs (MBA, Law, MFA, MD, etc.)
- Faculty

Fellowships with at least 50 percent Ph.D. students adapt most easily to this model. The most notable difference for this group is that the time-line may be extended where each stage may take up to a year to complete. A second difference is that weekly large group meetings will probably not be the goal. There are a number of different models for what a graduate fellowship may look like, and time should be spent considering which model will be most appropriate for the particular campus to which the planter is assigned. A third difference is that the number of students involved may look more comparable to an undergraduate commuter campus than a four year residential campus. Much of this depends upon the number of graduate students on a given campus and the number of Ph.D. students versus masters students.

One-year masters programs are generally very intensive—so much so that students do not have time to help build a fellowship. Additionally it is often difficult to identify leaders who can get plugged in before they finish their program. Hence, inordinate amounts of time ought not to be spent in developing a group around these students. Rather, invite them to already existing fellowships. In a given year there may be enough people from a particular program to sustain a program-specific small group, but it may be difficult to sustain such a group over multiple years.

Two-year masters programs have greater potential for sustaining a fellowship as long as there is careful attention to leadership selection. A group is always one year away from extinction. Whenever possible it is best to combine masters students with Ph.D. students in a single fellowship. When this is not possible, the planter will primarily be the one who identifies and invites students into leadership. It also tends to work better if leadership terms run from January to January at semester schools and April to April for quarter schools. The implication of this is that leaders must be identified quickly and given opportunities to show leadership potential early in their programs.

Each professional school program has its own set of opportunities and challenges. Faculty groups may develop less quickly than graduate student chapters. Two reasons for this are, first, the challenge of finding out who the Christian faculty are on a campus and, second, the difficulty of setting up appointments with faculty members. Finding Christian faculty often involves meeting with local pastors, administrators or other campus ministers who know someone who may know a faculty member. It also may take much longer to identify faculty who are missional and willing to take on leadership responsibilities. Early on, the planter may need to take on most leadership

responsibilities and then provide opportunities for faculty to lead. One additional way to identify Christian faculty is by holding well publicized one-day symposiums.

Number of core students needed by stage and type of group

	Stage 1*	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
	Core Group Gathering	Preview Gathering	Chapter Launch	Mission Launch
Graduate Students	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-60
MBA				
Law				
Medical				
Faculty	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25
2 or 4 Year Commuter	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-60
4 Year Residential	10-20	20-30	40-60	60-80

* Note each stage may take up to 1 year in the GFM context.

Specific Questions to Ask at each Stage in the GFM context

Spying out the Land

In the GFM context planters need ask, "Where is God at work on this campus?" On larger campuses with many graduate programs there is potential for multiple GFM chapters. But these often cannot be planted simultaneously. Hence, asking where God is already at work and where planting should begin is a critical question.

Additional questions to consider in the GFM context:

- How many masters students are there? How long are their programs? Which programs are the largest?
- How many Ph.D. students are there? Which programs are the largest?
- Are most of the students full-time? Are they working full-time and taking evening classes?
- Are there any churches or other campus ministries targeting graduate students?
- How many faculty are there? Are there any Christian faculty gatherings on campus already?
- What professional programs are on this campus? How many students in each? Are there other professional school ministries in existence?
- Are there particular churches that seem to attract more faculty and graduate students?
- Is there any graduate student or faculty housing on campus?
- Where do my gifts best fit with where God is already working?
- What GFM model of ministry will best fit this campus and my gifts?

Stage 1: Gathering the Core

Part of the reason the time-line is expanded is that it is difficult to identify new students throughout the semester or quarter. This makes the month before and the month after classes commence a critical time in the life of the plant. It is important to keep track of all contacts and to follow up quickly with a phone call or a face-to-face meeting, if possible (these do not need to be a one-on-one meeting). E-mail should not be the only form of follow-up, as it is very easy to ignore. It is strategic to follow-up contacts who do not become involved in the first semester or quarter in the second semester, quarter or even in the second year. In some programs, the first year can be so demanding that new graduate students may hesitate to commit. But students maybe more open to commit after they see that they can maintain their workload. It is also important to find ways to

connect with the friends and colleagues of students who become involved. One successful way to do this is to ask a student if you may host lunch with her and one of her colleagues. A simple sack lunch may open the door to deeper conversations.

The best time and place to meet graduate students is in the beginning of the year at the new graduate student orientation. Many campuses sponsor these events a couple of weeks before the semester or quarter begins and allow groups to set up tables at or near these events. Another event to consider is a picnic for new graduate students and local pastors. Churches that have a vision for ministry to the campus are often excited to participate and may even help supply the food. It is a great way to emphasize the importance of the local church to students and highlight to pastors InterVarsity's commitment to the local church.

- How do we serve non-missional Christians and potential missional Christians we meet?
- How do we help not-yet missional Christians become missional?

Stage 2: Preview Gatherings

- How often should preview gatherings be held? What are we previewing? (These may only happen once in a semester.)
- What does relevant evangelism look like in this context? How do we develop this value in our leaders?
- Do we have natural inviters in our group? How do we develop this skill in the more introverted members?
- If stage one takes one year, then NSO will take place in stage 2 for graduate fellowships.
- Are there faculty events that can be used to attract new faculty members to the fellowship?

Stage 3: Chapter Launch

- How often will our gathering events happen? What is their purpose?
- What does a gathering event look like in the faculty context? How often should these events take place?
- How are leaders being developed in faculty ministry?

Stage 4: Mission Launch

- Where is the best place for evangelism to take place in the graduate student and faculty context? How can Veritas Conversations and Forums be used for evangelistic purposes?
- What mission/urban projects are appropriate in the graduate and faculty contexts?
- In the faculty context how do we make our group known on campus?

Planting is a challenging endeavor in any context. But the fruit of building witnessing communities in places that never had them is everlasting.

[Chapter Planting in the Graduate Student and Faculty Ministry Context](#) is posted on the [Collegiate Ministries website](#) with related resources for InterVarsity staff and student leaders.