

Dedication

*To the 300
who gave of their time, space, wisdom, and resources.
The firstfruits are in this book.*

&

*To Steven H. & Audrey M. T.
who first helped me become a minister to the campus tribes
& were there in this most recent adventure.*

Reaching the Campus Tribes by Benson Hines **www.reachingthecampustribes.com**

Visit the site above for additional versions of this book (the easy-to-share version, high-resolution version, and more), other resources, or for ways to join in the cause. Important information and interesting tidbits can also be found on the [back pages](#) of this book!

This version is the most printable version, with smaller pictures and no pictures behind the text. (Some people may find this version more readable, too.) To make those changes, pictures and captions have been moved. Original page numbers are noted in parentheses before each caption.

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REASONS TO SHARE REACHING THE CAMPUS TRIBES

1. It's free?
2. It can get Christians talking about a really important issue.
3. It's got some great pictures.
4. A lot of people won't read something unless it's recommended by multiple pals, right?
5. This whole ebook trend could be really useful for Christian ministry...
6. This book impacts best only if it spreads beyond the campus tribes to other Christian leaders.
7. It's free?



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specific steps forward for reaching the campus tribes

1

look to the fields

This is a book about missions.

In 1792, during an era of particularly long book titles, William Carey published *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Many Christians believed that missionary activity was not especially necessary, since God could accomplish salvation without their “help.” As Carey’s title implies, his book argued that Christians should *use means* – should carry out purposeful activity – to reach unsaved people throughout the world.

In the centuries since, Carey’s words have taken hold within Christendom – to say the least! Today, it’s hard to imagine *not* “using means for the conversion of the

heathens.” Churches, denominations, and thousands of individual Christians have been gripped by a call to international missions, and this effort is now one of Evangelicals’ most significant investments. The entire world is different because Christians decided to “use means” to reach it, despite the difficulties and costs involved. And we continue to look for even better ways to reach more and more people, laboring in missions until Christ returns.

one hundred and eighty-one mission fields

Recently, I had the marvelous opportunity to visit *one hundred and eighty-one* separate mission fields in a single year. I walked among the natives, examined the Christian work (if any) being accomplished, and prayed for God’s wisdom for better reaching these tribes.

This was an eclectic group of tribes, with differences in size, history, economic prosperity, regional prominence, culture, and traditions. But these particular tribes share one thing: They may have more potential to influence the entire world than *any other* single kind of tribe. While we can never judge the overall importance of reaching one group of people over another, missiologists recognize the strategic value of reaching groups that serve as gateways to greater impact. And without a doubt, these 181 tribes (and the few thousand

tribes like them) provide an immense opportunity for impacting not only their regions but the entire world.

Yet the sad truth is that we have reached these people for Christ far less than we can or should. Despite the ease of accessing most of these tribes, despite the relationship American churches *already* have with many of the tribes' members, and despite these tribes' clear potential to influence the world, mission work among these *millions* of people is given very low priority by most Christians. This is true even among Christians who otherwise exhibit a true passion for missions.

But as in Carey's day, Christians are waking up to the necessity of greater missions efforts among these key tribes.

We call these tribes college campuses, and we desperately need to use greater means to reach them.

an enormous exploration

After ministering to college students directly for several years, in August 2007 I began a yearlong quest to explore college campuses throughout the nation and to research Christian work in these mission fields.

I had become increasingly familiar with college minis-

try in my state and even on the national landscape. Yet I knew there was much more to learn. I also knew that few people had a clear "on the ground" view of the state of college ministry nationwide. So my goal for this research was to gain as broad a view of Evangelical college ministry as possible and to come back with knowledge to share. This book provides the initial findings from that trip.

After the trip, I have continued to connect with college ministry leaders and to visit college ministries throughout the country. I have also been able to share about

We call these tribes college campuses, and we desperately need to use greater means to reach them.

my trip and its results – not only with college ministers, but also with pastors, parents, college students, seminary students, seminary faculty, denominational leaders, and others.

I share with them what I share in this book: better ways to think about college ministry and reasons we should make greater efforts to reach these tribes.

new attention

God continues to grip college students in this key stage

of life. I have been so fortunate to see college students from across the U.S. meeting God personally, learning His truths, spreading His Kingdom, and finding their place in His plan.

College ministries are often the primary catalysts for this spiritual growth, and there are many of these ministries making exciting inroads with students and their campuses. Strong college ministry work can be found in the expected places – like large churches, Christian colleges, and major public schools. But it can also be found in unexpected places: community colleges, urban centers, churches far away from any college, and more.

But even though some Christians have risen to the task, college ministry is far from a high priority within American Christianity as a whole. This has led to a lack of needed attention, investment, training, and the like. As a result, our present ministry to college students often lacks needed depth and breadth, while many students remain untouched by college ministry at all.

However, American Christians have started focusing anew on reaching these students. Denominations, networks, seminaries, churches, pastors, and other Christians are asking how we might better reach people in their late teen years and beyond. Some are finding an-

swers to these questions, and new ministries and other efforts are being planned and started all over the country. In fact, those Christian groups and churches which are not focusing on reaching the “campus tribes” may soon find themselves lagging behind thousands of ministries that are welcoming them with open arms.

As college ministry is becoming a greater priority for American Christianity, my hope is to fan that flame by every means I can.

a better approach

Making college ministry a priority is not enough, however. A greater zeal for reaching students must be paired with wisdom about how this work will best proceed.

Many Christians view college ministry as simply one area of Christian Education, comparable to our work with children, senior adults, youth, or single people. But ultimately, every experience I’ve had observing and participating in college ministry has clarified a better way of approaching ministry to college students. This idea has the potential to change the way we value and practice college ministry, and it’s something I’ve hinted at already.

What is that idea?

The practice of college ministry is far more like Missions than like Christian Education.

So ministering to a college campus is in many ways more like Missions in Mozambique than it is even like Youth Ministry.

Obviously, that's not the way most Christian pastors, church members, parents, or opinion leaders think about college ministry yet. Even college ministers themselves don't always realize that their work really is a form of *missions*. But in some places this idea – of *missiological* college ministry – is already clarifying and fueling college ministry practice. Hopefully this book can spread the idea even further.

this book

Just as William Carey shared his ideas about international missions through a pamphlet so long ago, my goal here is to share these first thoughts about college ministry in a format as accessible as possible for the many who need to hear this message.

So this short book is more proclamation than primer, more megaphone than microscope, an “opening in-

quiry” rather than any final word. It may seem to have too few illustrations, too few evidences, and even too few pages. But I hope this book raises questions and drives people to find out more. And if this book does fuel an interest in college ministry, then I and countless others will have many opportunities to share examples, spiritual insights, facts, arguments, and “best practices” for this field.

For now, this book is the urgent message I would share with Christian leaders over coffee, not the ultimate “how-to” for this vital area. I have focused here on the big picture, which means I don't get to discuss all the specific skills, methods, and spiritual needs involved.

But the big picture still gives us bold ideas to consider. For example, I will discuss:

- ⊕ How ministry to college students is quite different from both young adult ministry and youth ministry.
- ⊕ How college campuses are a lot like *tribes*.
- ⊕ What commonalities are shared by the three “branches” of college ministry.
- ⊕ How strategic student discipleship is lacking in many Christian colleges.
- ⊕ Why a large, city-wide worship service for college

students is often a *terrible* way to jump-start a college ministry.

- ⊕ Why better college ministry will lead to better youth ministry, better young adult ministry, and better missions work.
- ⊕ Why college ministry is “R&D” for Christianity.
- ⊕ Why churches with no plan for college students should help their high school kids find another church – and what it actually means for a church to have a College Student Plan.
- ⊕ How Christians can approach college ministry in many ways beyond the “classic” forms.
- ⊕ Why impacting college students is a far more practical undertaking than many people assume.
- ⊕ And many other important ideas.

If this book gives you food for thought, I urge every reader to share it with others. Dialogue with me and with others in this field. Read my blog, where I daily discuss what I’ve learned. Ask questions, and give feedback. Join the cause, however you’re able – even in your own area by helping reach your own local, beautiful campuses. As we use means to reach the campus tribes, we’re all in this together.

from here to there

For those who appreciate knowing where a book is

headed, here’s the plan:

- ⊕ Chapter 2 will briefly look at how I ended up on an amazing yearlong road trip and summarize what I experienced.
- ⊕ Chapter 3 reveals what I discovered about the present state of college ministry (and why our present efforts to reach students aren’t enough).
- ⊕ Chapter 4 is the heart of the book; it discusses what it means to see college ministry as missions.
- ⊕ Chapter 5 looks at *why* we should use means for college ministry, followed by addressing some frequent concerns in Chapter 6.
- ⊕ Two special chapters bring the book to a close. “Orienting” provides a conclusion to the main book and a vision for why this is so important. Then the lengthy Epilogue provides a road map forward, with specific next steps for reaching the campus tribes better.

While there may be plenty of content in this book, none of my research or ideas mean much if they don’t translate into better ministry on actual college campuses. So although I need to speak in broad, big-picture terms for much of this book, I encourage every reader to think *specifically*. Compare these thoughts to college ministry at your own nearby schools and in your own

church. Think about your own experiences in college, as well as the college experience of people you know – like your friends, your children, and the high school graduates who grew up in your church.

As you do, consider whether we should indeed use greater means to reach collegians.



(page 7) The Hawkeye tribe of Iowa experienced massive, harmful flooding in the month after this May 2008 visit. The tribe is still rebuilding.

(5) The Griffin tribe, located in the northwest corner of its nation, is known for its hedonistic Renn Fayre festival and for revering communism, atheism, and “free love.” The tribe also contains some of its country’s most intelligent and creative people. Christian ministry among the Griffins remains limited. (top right)

(8) Few people outside the state of California realize that one of the most successful college ministry climates in the U.S. is among the Mustangs of Cal Poly. The state’s pastors regularly joke that this public college is “the cheapest Christian education in the state.” (right)



2

exploring the campus tribes

In June 2007, I was contemplating what God was calling me to *next*.

I had just spent a year as the full-time college minister of a large church. When I had entered the church as its fourth college minister in four years, we had a small group of students, poor reputation on the campuses, and some behind-the-scenes ministry problems that students knew little about. I knew my work was cut out for me, and I knew I needed lots of God's brilliance and the support of His people.

During that year, we began to draw new students who were interested in taking ownership of this latest version of the church's ministry. We also reconnected with

many students who had grown up in the church but had avoided the college ministry after high school. At the same time, we naturally lost some students who preferred the old ways, and we saw quite a few older students graduate – students who had somehow stayed connected since the last attendance surge a few years earlier.

I am very sure there are things we (and I) could have done better during that year. But we were fortunate enough to begin developing strong connections to local campuses, to find a core of committed students, and to begin student leadership training and student ministry teams. Meanwhile, the long-term vision for our ministry was being hashed out as quickly as possible, while I also attended to the weekly demands of teaching, administration, and the duties that come with working on a church staff.

But even though we drew dozens of new students that year, the loss of other students meant our closely watched Sunday School numbers appeared to be stagnant – or worse. Our church was also between pastors, and finances were tight. And like most church college ministries that aren't in college towns, ours wasn't exactly at the top of the priority list for the congregation.

So when church leaders decided to defund the College Minister position at the end of that school year, I was not too surprised. Although I recognized the advances we had made and saw a bright future for our ministry if we would continue to push forward, it was hard to blame the leaders for their decision. Who had trained them in the unique nuances of college ministry? What books or leaders proclaimed its importance? Then why would they evaluate college ministry any differently than youth ministry or the other Christian Education ministries in our church?

what came next

After years of ministering to college students and connecting with other ministry leaders, I already knew how unappreciated and misunderstood college ministry is among American Christians. This newest experience simply made the issues even more real to me, because I too had felt the sting of these problems.

Who had trained them in the unique nuances of college ministry?

I began to ask God if there might be something I could do right then, as a 28-year-old single guy, to help college ministry grow stronger as an entire “field of ministry.” I had noticed that Christians’ interest in college



(10) The unique buildings of the Engineers of MIT (main picture), the geometric fountain of the Boilermakers of Purdue (left), and the “binary bridge” erected at Georgia Tech each point to the unique cultures of these technologically-minded tribes.

(12) This road sign at the Navigators national headquarters highlights the broad field before us.



(13) This protest over worker wages, held at the University of California Santa Cruz, was one of a few I encountered during the year. Others included a sit-in at the University of North Carolina and a tree-sitter at the University of California Berkeley. Social action of this kind has long been one unique aspect of the campus mission fields.

(11) William Carey University commemorates the missions pioneer. Included on campus is a museum celebrating Carey's contributions not only to classic missions theory but also to social justice, Bible translation, science, and other fields. (The swan in the foreground is one of many scattered throughout Hattiesburg, Mississippi.)



ministry seemed to be growing; could I somehow help stoke that fire?

It was my friend Steven who first threw out the idea of taking a road trip to see college ministry in action across the nation. I scoffed a bit at first, but the truth is, that suggestion wasn't as out-of-the-blue as it might seem. My first solo, multi-state road trip had come a few years earlier after buying a large number of theology books on eBay. During that trek to California, I visited a few college campuses and thoroughly enjoyed my time on those mission fields. Ultimately, other road trips came up for a variety of reasons, and I began to fall in love with campuses across the country – and with the nationwide efforts to reach them.

Meanwhile, through both work as a correspondent for various Christian newspapers and attendance at numerous college ministry conferences, I had already interviewed and collaborated with college ministers in several different states. I knew that interviewing these ministers on a national scale could provide the field of college ministry with an enormous amount of wisdom.

So even though I first laughed off my friend's suggestion, I began to pray about taking a yearlong trek. I knew that Rick and Kay Warren had originally used a

map to pray about where to plant a church; that seemed like a good idea as I prayed about my own next step. Soon that U.S. map on the wall of my apartment was dotted with all sorts of possible college ministry explorations... and through *lots* of prayer and thought and counsel, ultimately I did indeed believe God was leading me to take this trip.

Knowing this was now a matter of obedience, I took out loans, packed up my stuff, and left Dallas in time for the fall semester – only three weeks after deciding to take the trip. I counted on God’s provision for His call, and He certainly confirmed that call throughout the year. (At this point, generous Christians have helped with some of the cost, but a huge number of others helped through their hospitality along the way. This included dozens of cups of coffee, meals in all kinds of local joints, and numerous beds, couches, and other sleeping spots!)

exploring college ministry

Across 370 days, I explored 181 campuses and visited 44 states, Washington, D.C., Canada, and Mexico.

As I made my way throughout the U.S., in some cases I spent several days or even weeks in a region, diving deeply into the college ministry situation at the various



(15) Hockey is a proud tradition for many campus tribes, but clearly this is a regional difference between colleges. Here, fans and cheerleaders root on the Huskies of Northeastern against the Catamount tribe from Vermont.

(14) Specific ministries to women and to men are two of the most common niche ministries within larger college ministries. Here, students at California Baptist University attend a special Women’s Chapel; my (authorized) attendance was one of many unique moments on the yearlong road trip. (top)



(16) The Quarter System, which splits the academic calendar into four sections (instead of the usual two semesters and summer) has been adopted by some colleges, including Louisiana Tech. The shortened timeframe and greater number of “start-up” and “wind-down” periods affect the college ministries in these contexts.

local campuses. Other times, I was in one location for only a short time. Though I entered the trip knowing some ministries and campuses I hoped to explore, I deliberately kept my plans open to adjust to new discoveries along the way. This made way for God’s amazing Providence, and He indeed brought great surprises all year.

The most important activity during those twelve months was discussing college ministry with around 300 people. These men and women included traditional college ministers from all three “branches” of college ministry: campus-based ministry, church-based ministry, and Christian college chaplaincy. But I also got to meet with regional and national college ministry leaders, seminary professors of collegiate ministry, church leaders, Christian college personnel, student leaders, and many others who connect to this field of ministry. I encountered people from many Evangelical denominations, as well as plenty of non-denominational leaders and some leaders from outside Evangelical streams.

Incredibly, most of those meetings involved an hour-long (or longer) interview. I sought to learn about each of these ministers’ contexts and the wisdom they have for the field of college ministry. Though I asked about several key issues on a regular basis, I had decided

against confining my research to a standard set of topics. Instead, I wanted to “follow the story,” allowing the unique nature of each college ministry to help guide my questions.

Besides those interviews, I also visited numerous college ministry activities during the year. I also attended several college ministry-related conferences and training events, visited 172 church worship services, and had many other adventures.

And of course, I spent lots of time on the campuses themselves, where college students live and work and play and learn. (Much can be learned in any “vision trip” to a campus mission field.)

a fruitful adventure

As you might imagine, I found myself in a wide variety of college ministry environments – including a beach-side Bible study in Jacksonville, a college student conference in Vermont, and a college ministry service held in a former Wal-Mart in Ruston, Louisiana. I explored the various branches of college ministry by attending such activities as the large group meeting of Chi Alpha in snowy Fargo, a “Cereal Slosh” event in the college ministry of North Point Community Church, and New Student Orientation activities at Moody Bible Institute.

I also stumbled into several providential, unplanned adventures, like attending a Ravi Zacharias forum about finding purpose in the midst of tragedy at Virginia Tech, eating pizza and discussing ministry with the Orthodox Christian Fellowship of Ohio State, viewing the graduation ceremony of Focus on the Family Institute, driving several vanloads of local students around Amherst, Massachusetts, and describing the national college ministry scene in a staff meeting at Minneapolis’s Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Those are just a few of the many experiences I had on the trip, but they provide a good picture of the breadth of this opportunity. For a complete list of every interview, ministry visit and other “exploration” from the trip, visit exploringcollegeministry.com/itinerary. And as I stated in the first chapter, I hope to share much more about this trip as God provides the opportunity.

But for now, in the chapters that follow, I present the key things I learned from this far-reaching experience.

3

white unto harvest

Many books could be written (and should be written) about the histories, accomplishments, and advances of Evangelical college ministry in America. Some large national ministries have been impactful for decades. The same is true for many individual college ministries, from the best-known at Christian colleges, secular campuses, and in churches, to the hundreds of ministries less well-known but still powerfully changing students' lives. I look forward to telling (and hearing) more stories of what God has already done in college ministry, because they are wonderful stories that glorify Him and encourage the Body of Christ.

But as I discussed in the first chapter, I'm writing this particular book to present a better way to think about

college ministry. My year of research gave ample opportunity to see that American Christians are in desperate need of a new vision for reaching these people. If we don't change, we will continue to lose our influence with each successive generation.

"college ministry" means...

Before I discuss the national college ministry scene, I need to make three brief clarifications.

First, "college ministry" describes ministry to people whose lifestyle, state of transition, focus of community, and age are generally "collegiate." While these lines can be blurry and individual ministry audiences may vary, my belief is that these four factors separate this life stage from both the youth and young adult stages.

Second, I categorize college ministry activity into three branches:

- ⊕ **Campus-based college ministry** (including parachurch, denominational, and independent ministries centering their activity on the local campus)
- ⊕ **Church-based college ministry** (ministries overseen within individual churches)
- ⊕ **Spiritual development at Christian colleges** (the specific people or departments in Christian

colleges dedicated to student discipleship, often called “spiritual life” or “chaplaincy”)

While this categorization isn’t perfect, these three branches provide a basic, helpful way to understand the majority of ministries to college students. This also reminds us of a key truth: These are branches *of the same type of ministry*. While many people don’t recognize the similarities in these three areas of college ministry, they not only have much in common, but there is much each branch can learn from the others.

Third, my focus here is *American* college ministry, since that is what I have known and what I have had the chance to explore. Hopefully what I share will in some way resound with leaders in other countries, but it is important to recognize the severe differences between American college ministry and some collegiate work elsewhere.

assuming all is well

When Christians wonder about the state of college ministry, it is easy to assume this area is being handled just fine. But we can always pick-and-choose examples in this regard. We may be most familiar with the largest national ministries, with ministries at a specific college, with the strongest ministries in our denomina-

tion, or with the most effective college ministries in our region. And with that basic information and nothing to indicate otherwise, it’s easy to assume that all is well...

Parents and youth pastors may assume their high school graduates will find active, effective college ministries when they go to school. They may also assume that those students will find student-friendly churches that welcome them with open arms.

Church leaders may assume that college campuses near their church have solid spiritual opportunities for students, removing any need to get involved as a church.

And when students attend Christian colleges, everyone may assume they will emerge four years later in better spiritual shape than when they entered.

All too often, these assumptions turn out to be untrue.

As I traveled the nation, I discovered three major problems limiting our effectiveness in reaching students. Each problem has several ramifications.

Problem One: A Collegiate Attention Gap

The most obvious problem for the field of college min-

istry is simply the widespread *absence* of college ministry practice, investment, or attention. It is shocking to notice the inequality between efforts to minister in this key period and Christian ministry to both youth and adults. (Many of the reasons for these choices will be discussed later, particularly in Chapter 6.) This gap in concern for college students – the Collegiate Attention Gap – is extremely prevalent and affects millions of students on an annual basis.

the Gap in churches

Of course, churches offer the clearest instances of the Collegiate Attention Gap. Despite the heavy emphasis on ministering to children and youth, many congregations make unapologetically lackluster attempts to impact or even retain college-age individuals. Other churches have attempted this ministry but have failed to establish a successful beachhead in reaching local campuses.

Regardless of the reason for a church's difficulties in keeping and serving college students, the presence of the Collegiate Attention Gap is devastating. *For many Christian young people, there is no continuity in their church experience between high school and adulthood.* As youth, students may not yet know about the campus-based ministries ready to disciple them in college, but



(17) Snow at Gonzaga University in April 2008 made clear the wide variety of tribal contexts. Even basic regional differences like weather patterns can affect the schedules, activities, and contingency plans needed for campus missions.

(18) Students, faculty, and staff gather for a Chapel service at Seattle Pacific University. Chapel is an interesting dynamic of the college ministry in many Christian colleges. The number of chapels per week, student attendance requirements, student enjoyment of chapel services, and the chapel formats vary widely between various schools.



(19) The Veritas Forum has a complementary ministry focused on bringing major Christian thinkers to speak to campus tribes. I had the chance to visit Tim Keller's sessions on subsequent nights at UC Berkeley and Stanford University (pictured) in March 2008. Both were co-sponsored by Reformed University Fellowship. (top)

(20) Campuses also draw major thinkers who speak against Christianity. Less than a week after Tim Keller's lecture and Q&A, notable atheists Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss dialogued publicly before the same Stanford Cardinal tribe.



they do see that their church's ministry to them basically stops after high school. And even if college students find helpful campus-based ministries once they arrive at school, they often remain entirely unnoticed by churches during those years. We should not be surprised at reports that 70% or more of our "good youth group kids" are no

longer connected to a church after a few years.

Though it may be a slight caricature, many churches seem to present students with the following "blessing" as they graduate from the high school youth group:

"We have loved having you in our church. Please come back to work youth camp or Vacation Bible School for us during your summer breaks!

"And otherwise, we'll see you when you're married and have a kid. Until then, God bless you."

campus-based ministries and the Gap

Of course, the Collegiate Attention Gap in churches is what many campus-based ministries have sought to fill

for decades. In some cases, they have done a terrific job. Their presence and efforts on local campuses may in fact mean that not every local church needs a traditional, all-encompassing college ministry, as will be discussed later.

But our present campus-based ministries are certainly not able to meet the full discipleship needs of the millions of college students in the United States. At many schools, campus-based ministry is non-existent or only barely present – even at colleges with multiple thousands of students. Campus-based ministries also may have little contact with students during breaks in the school calendar, which make up a third of a typical year. And what happens to college students after graduation, if they have been ignored by local churches for an entire (and important) stage of life?

Yet the general Collegiate Attention Gap among American Christians affects campus-based ministries directly, too. For instance, it appears that few denominations have made college ministry a high priority in these days – at least based on relative levels of staffing, financial investment, networking efforts, training procedures, and attention within the denomination. Even denominations with widespread campus-based ministry sometimes show a disappointing lack of concern, despite the

fact that college ministry contributes so heavily to the future of those denominations. Likewise, both denominational and independent parachurch college ministries often struggle to receive investment or even *notice* from college students, parents, potential supporters, potential volunteers, and Christian leaders.

Christian colleges and the Gap

Students often experience the Collegiate Attention Gap even when attending Christian colleges. Strong, strategic discipleship of students does not appear to be automatic at Christian colleges, as I have observed firsthand and have heard from countless ministers and students.

In talking with many people assigned to chaplain college students at Christian schools, I have encountered broad differences in the attention paid to impacting students in specialized, relevant ways. While students may happen to *know* more Christian adults at a Christian college than at a secular school, not all campus discipleship programs are purposely relevant or particularly well-developed. Certainly there are Christian colleges with long histories of cultivating real spiritual growth in their students. But this sort of spiritual advantage is not evident at every Christian college – including some known for strong biblical education.

Further, even those Christian college staff members with great hearts and effective plans for impacting students may be stymied by their own employers. Spiritual Life departments at Christian colleges often face the same lack of recognition and support – the Collegiate Attention Gap – that all college ministry does. At a few schools, students' spiritual development is obviously a priority (as reflected in financing, staffing, organizational structure, and even its prominence in informational materials). But in many Christian colleges this department appears to be only a small concern to the university itself.

It is possible that leaders of some Christian colleges see less need for specific “college ministry” because their students are attending a *Christian* school and may even be training for Christian vocations. But those of us who have ministered to such students have seen that they need to be disciplined *as college students* as much as any others, and in fact they can sometimes need very focused attention because of their environment.

Finally, even quite effective ministries at Christian colleges may not be situated to reach *every* student well. Yet other college ministries, such as independent campus- or church-based ministries, are rare at these Christian schools. Thus many of a Christian college's stu-



(22) The class stones on Colorado College's Alumni Plaza highlight the interaction between the culture and college campuses. Each incoming class of students provides a unique new missions opportunity.



(23) The popularity of fraternities and sororities varies widely among campus tribes. At the University of Washington, Greek houses saturate the neighborhood directly across from campus. Here, the ladies of Delta Zeta appear to have helped decorate the Sig Ep fraternity house.

dents may personally experience the Collegiate Attention Gap, even if the on-campus ministry is strong.

the Gap and geography

One reason the Collegiate Attention Gap continues to exist is that many Christians judge college ministry success based only on particular geographical locations. Specifically, it can be tempting to look at the national college ministry scene primarily through the lens of the two places where college ministry often flourishes most easily: the Bible Belt and true “college towns.”

In the case of the Bible Belt (often used to describe much of the South and Southeast), a “Christian-friendly culture” obviously makes it easier for college ministries to draw students. This culture also leads to increased investment and other kinds of support from communities, alumni, and parents.

Meanwhile, in college towns (where a large campus serves as the “hub” for the city), the integration of “Town and Gown” (community and college) is usually at its peak. This helps prompt local Christians to connect to and minister to the campus. So it is often not difficult to find well-financed college ministries that have been established for years. Further, cultural factors about the schools themselves seem to aid ministry

development – including the large size of many of these colleges, their residential climate, and strong school spirit that helps bond students.

We should celebrate what God has done in these places. But many Christians may forget that Bible Belt and college town settings are by no means the only collegiate settings. Colleges in other places are drawing millions of college students who need Christ, yet Christians have often had much less success establishing effective campus missions there.

Some of my favorite individuals to meet have been the pioneers serving as college ministers in particularly under-reached areas. It is clear that these men and women are dedicated to seeing students reached, even if there is minimal outside investment or involvement as they work for this cause.

The rest of us must remember not to look only at a small segment of our nation (geographically or otherwise) to determine “the present state of college ministry.” Yet this seems to be exactly what happens, as well-reached campuses continue to be well-reached (or even become saturated with ministries) while the Collegiate Attention Gap affects a large portion of the U.S. map.

And though Bible Belt campuses and college towns may experience the Collegiate Attention Gap less often than other environments, it certainly doesn’t mean that “all is well” in those places, either. College ministry in those contexts can still suffer from the other maladies I will discuss later in this chapter.

the Collegiate Attention Gap elsewhere

The gap in concern for reaching collegians extends beyond the settings already named. For instance, many seminaries pay little or no attention to college ministry. Multiple courses, entire concentrations, or full degrees are often provided for youth ministry and several other areas. However, college ministry is often relegated to a single course – and in many major Evangelical seminaries, it is not taught at all.

The effects of the Gap show up when college ministry leaders look for helpful ministry resources, too. These can include Bible study materials written for college students, teaching curricula and media, or manuals about the practice of college ministry – all of which can be difficult to locate.

The Collegiate Attention Gap directly affects college ministry leaders, as well. College ministers face an uphill battle for recognition, support, and investment.

This is true in all three branches of college ministry and is one of the most painful realities in the field.

of pennies and people

A clear symptom of the Collegiate Attention Gap is a lack of the necessary finances and staffing for this important effort.

Most memorable to me are the stories I heard during my trip of funds being “reallocated” within single churches and entire denominations to ministries that were seen as more important or more viable. Some of these budget choices have become the stuff of legend (and not in a positive way), as college ministers bemoan decisions that saved money at the time but harmed impact on campuses for years or decades to come.

On campuses, in churches, and in Christian colleges it is obvious that many college ministry efforts are simply *not* considered an investment priority.

In some cases, college ministries may have never received much funding or staffing while overseers wait for these ministries to prove their worth to the organization. But while they hold back funds, leaders may not have the time and resources required to run programs



(24) The Chaparrals of College of DuPage are one of the largest community college tribes in the nation, with over 30,000 students in the tribe each semester. Nationally, ministry within 2-year college contexts is sparse, despite the size and accessibility of many of these schools. Just as these schools often prepare students to progress to 4-year institutions, college ministry in these places can prepare students for leadership in their next endeavors, whether those take place in college or the “real world.”

(25) This display at Minnesota State University Moorhead provides some images from the long history of Campus Crusade for Christ.



(26) These dancing trees are a celebrated tradition among the Cardinal tribe of Stanford. At this basketball game, the tribe hosted the Cougars of Washington State University and honored their own team's graduating seniors.

while *also* working strategically for long-term success. Though one caricature of college ministers may involve only eating pizza and “hanging out” with students, the reality of their job – when done well – is complex. If leaders are not given enough hours or budget at the beginning of a college ministry to lay the extensive

Some of these budget choices have become the stuff of legend (and not in a positive way).

groundwork it needs, the ministry might never get off the ground. (Components of this groundwork will be discussed later in the book.)

Meanwhile, even as some college ministries do prosper, it is amazing to note the limited staffing they are allowed. Often, this takes the form of spreading a college minister's duties – either across multiple campuses (in campus-based ministry) or across multiple life stages (in churches). Other times, only one or two people are directed to reach campuses with tens of thousands of students. (We must remember that the mission field is the size of the *campus*, not the present size of the ministry.)

While budgeting decisions have to be made and resources – and people – will at times need to be spread

thinner than we would like, many of our present choices weaken our effectiveness in reaching campuses.

Problem Two: A Struggle for Viability

The Collegiate Attention Gap is certainly not the only difficulty facing American college ministry. Another concern is the lack of long-term, established college ministries that are making a permanent impact on their mission fields.

loving for the long haul

Many college ministries lack *longevity*. Even though longevity seems to be a major factor in strengthening college ministry impact, many ministries aren't established long enough for students to see those benefits. Many of the college ministries I encountered during my trip had only been recently planted, had recent leader turnover, or had otherwise been "restarted" in the past few years. A one- to three-year lifespan seems to be the reality for most new college ministry endeavors.

There will certainly be times when leaders are replaced or a college ministry's vision needs to be recast. But changes – even major changes – don't have to break a college ministry's momentum, if the ministry has been "built to last" in the first place. Yet this sort of strategic

development appears to be pretty rare.

Notably, when longevity is lacking, the students connected to these ministries may experience many of the effects of the Collegiate Attention Gap, since the impact they receive is ineffective or short-lived.

the "Turbulent Ten Years"

One of the harshest realities that became clear in my explorations is the troubling track record of churches' college ministry attempts. Many of the church-based ministers I interviewed described a difficult, multi-year

history of mixed success, leadership turnover, and lack of longitudinal ministry impact in their church.

A one- to three-year lifespan seems to be the reality for most new college ministry endeavors.

We might dub this very common malady the "Turbulent Ten Years," because a *decade* or more might be spent starting and

restarting college ministry efforts. This doesn't mean that good people aren't involved or good resources aren't provided for these college ministries. In many cases, those things are available. It is simply clear that it has been quite difficult for church-based college min-

istries to persist to become established, long-lasting ministries.

Each semester, churches attempt new college ministry endeavors, and that is a positive thing. But often church leaders seem to have a mentality similar to, “Let’s just try something!” Churches may expect students already attending the church, passionate volunteer leaders or staff members, a healthy budget, or a designated meeting space to be sufficient for building an effective college ministry. So they forge ahead and “see what sticks” while paying little attention to strategy, planning, or the wisdom of outsiders. During my trip and afterwards, I have encountered numerous churches continuing in this course without recognizing the poor résumé it offers as its credentials.

The phenomenon of the “Turbulent Ten Years” can apply to any college ministry, including those not in churches. But many *campus*-based ministries at least begin their work with a specific plan borne out of college ministry expertise. Church ministries, however, often enter the mission field without collaborating with others, including either college ministry specialists or local college ministers who could provide insight about their specific context.



(29) Vintage Faith Church, one of the earliest and best-known “Emerging” churches, is located close to the Banana Slug tribe in Santa Cruz, California. Like many contemporary churches, Vintage Faith has drawn many college students while continuing to work out its plan for specialized ministry to their tribes.

(28) Xenos Christian Fellowship has drawn Buckeyes to a unique church and college ministry environment since the days of the Jesus Movement. The church places a strong priority on expository teaching, functions largely through ministry houses, uses no worship music in corporate meetings, and sees many students come to Christ. (top)



(31) The Vandal tribe in Moscow, Idaho, enjoys a truly impressive student center. There is wide variation in the quality of facilities among both public and private schools.

At this point, I simply want to note this reality. Later, I will offer suggestions to change this common course. But whether or not any of my suggestions are followed, I still encourage church leaders and church members to recognize that starting college ministry “as usual” *isn’t working well*. And there is a cost to our trial and error. Both resources and goodwill (of participants, other students, campus authorities, and community members) can be diminished by ineffective attempts.

I would not mention this reality in this “opening inquiry” if it was not so prevalent. Right now, the entire practice of building new church-based college ministries seems rather hit or miss, and this is hurting Christ’s cause among students. We need a different “usual.”

even in the churches we least expect

Surprisingly, this struggle for college ministry success takes place even in churches we might think would have specific advantages. Two types of churches in particular come to mind: churches famously effective in other areas and churches that are especially “contemporary.” In both cases, there appears to be no clear preponderance of college ministry success in these types of congregations.

During my trip, I explored the college ministries in many of America's largest, fastest-growing, most historic, and most influential churches. Only a small number of these churches were presently experiencing clear, long-lasting college ministry effectiveness. But a large number reported struggling in this area, and some had little or no specific ministry to collegians.

It might be expected that more "contemporary" church forms would see success in impacting college students and reaching college campuses for Christ. But modern forms (such as Emerging Churches or special contemporary worship services) also showed quite varied success in effectively assimilating and impacting college students.

While both highly popular churches and contemporary churches often draw many college-age people, specialized discipleship, ongoing campus outreach, and healthy assimilation are not always evident. This does not mean that these churches have always been neglectful, though. In fact, in speaking with the leaders at some of these churches, their desire to reach college students was clear; they simply continue to ponder how exactly to perform this specialized ministry within their contexts.

But in some cases church leadership has decided that their church's best plan for impact involves nothing more than assimilating college students into the basic structures of the church. This "full assimilation" method is available for any church, and it certainly reflects a clear respect for college students as full members of the local congregation. At the same time, it must be remembered that many college students' cultural identity and community are located not in the local neighborhood but specifically within their collegiate experience. Thus any church aiming to reach people "missionally" and contextually should consider the special situation of college students. Unless efforts are made to reach campus tribes on their own terms, we may actually be missing opportunities for relevant impact in this important life stage. And we will be removing students from the very communities in which they presently have the most influence for God's Kingdom.

Problem Three: Lack of Growth & Health

A third big problem facing college ministry today is a lack of growth and health. In individual college ministries, there rarely seems to be a clear priority placed on increasing the effectiveness, breadth of reach, or excellence of ministry activity. Long-lasting ministries may look much the same as they did a decade ago – and are

probably seeing similar results. Worse, as campuses and students steadily change, unchanging ministries can easily see their former success erode over time. And across the nation, some college ministry efforts even exhibit unhealthy approaches and methods.

college ministry is missing momentum

One area in which college ministry reflects underdevelopment is its lack of momentum – both as a field of ministry and in individual local college ministries. Instead of growing stronger and wiser over time and striving for better methods and fruit in each new school year, we seem to be largely content with static, “stable” college ministry practices.

One reason college ministry seems to remain stuck in its “first generation” is a lack of shared wisdom. This type of sharing begins with more experienced college ministers sharing their insights with newer leaders. However, this happens far less than it should, and there aren’t nearly enough platforms to facilitate this need.

Likewise, one of the complaints I hear most from college ministers concerns the rarity of ministry books, textbooks, articles, blogs, or other published resources. It is also difficult to find conferences, networks, web sites, and research that provide greater wisdom for the

field. Though modern college ministry actually has a history stretching back over a century, we have few widely available opportunities to learn from those who have gone before us.

Training opportunities in college ministry are also limited, especially outside of the largest national campus-based ministries. This includes having few opportunities

We seem to be largely content with static, “stable” college ministry practices.

for apprenticeship, because so few college ministries have more than one staff member. And as noted above, in many seminaries college ministry is lacking from the curriculum altogether. (Yet it is in seminaries that some of the best

momentum for better college ministry could be gained.)

trouble on the receiving end, too

But there is another side to this problem; college ministers must effectively make use of the collaboration that is made available. The lack of *demand* is keeping such opportunities limited. Purposeful collaboration between local college ministers seems rare; even less do ministers seem to make good use of conferences,

books, internet tools, and other resources. While time constraints are certainly an issue here, intentional collaboration appears to be rare in many parts of the college ministry world.

But most college ministers also appear to be largely unaware of the resources, ideas, models, and methods that are available. Even ministers tied by denominations or other networks can be largely unfamiliar with what their own organizations provide – which highlights a clear communication deficiency within those groups.

Whatever the causes for a lack of collaboration, all this means that collegiate ministry as a field – and individual college ministries around the country – may not be improving much over time. As a new generation of people, the Millennial generation, has now reached college age, we stand to lose major ground in our effectiveness on campuses by not actively progressing as an entire field of ministry. If we refuse to develop this field now, college ministry might never be ready to encounter the challenges and opportunities this new group of students is bringing.

If we ever plan to push for college ministry momentum, now is the time to do so.

desperately seeking strategy

While the field and individual ministries lack momentum, we also seem to be taking little opportunity to develop *strategy* for reaching the campus tribes.

Efforts at strategy have historically been a cornerstone of much of the work and expansion of college ministry in America. Several denominational ministries, for example, show clear evidence that their creations were the result of *strategic* planning. Another superb example is the work of Bill Bright, whose ideas led to the enormously successful Campus Crusade for Christ.

However, today collegiate ministry as a whole does not appear to place a high priority on implementing in-depth strategy for reaching campuses. While some networks and organizations may continue to focus here, as a whole the work of strategy appears to be undervalued.

It seems that much of the focus of college ministry is now on *action*, not planning. In my many interviews with college ministers, it was rare to hear about long-range strategy, either for individual student discipleship or better campus outreach. When I would ask strategy questions – what outcomes are you aiming for? How do students “progress” through your ministry?

What are your dreams for this ministry? What are you doing to reach the campus as a whole? – few ministers seemed focused on these sorts of issues.

But that's not to discredit those ministers – there are lots of reasons they haven't been encouraged or allowed to think that way. When we teach college ministry, we often focus on the actions involved, rather than how to decide what actions a campus tribe needs in the first place. When an average parent, pastor, or overseer thinks about college ministry, they probably think only about teaching and small groups, social events and worship services – rarely about strategically reaching a whole campus or developing a ministry that will effectively impact students for years to come. Oftentimes pastors, regional leaders, and other overseers want to

see *results* from new college ministries – not plans.

When these are the expectations, college ministers are hired to fill these “action” roles – not to plan a *strategic campus mission*.

the looming transition

One area of college ministry that needs to be addressed strategically is its apparent ineffectiveness in helping students enter a *lifetime* of following Christ. College ministries generally focus very little on preparing people to transition to life after college. And ministries' effectiveness is rarely assessed by how well students thrive spiritually in the years after they graduate.

While some major college ministries are attempting



(33) The Thunder of Wheaton College have included many future Christian leaders; Billy and Ruth Graham, Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, John Piper, and Rob Bell are a few former tribe members. This mural in the student center celebrates some of the tribe's rich history.

new efforts to help students with the post-college transition, the fact that this emphasis is so new among even the strongest groups is not a good sign. It is surprising that preparing students for this transition hasn't been one of college ministry's *primary* tasks all along.

Sadly, anecdotal evidence appears to suggest that many Christian graduates are finding it very difficult to transition successfully to the young adult world. Even when these students have been involved in college ministries, they may not have been prepared for continued growth outside of that setting.

when “enough” is not the issue

I wrote earlier of the disappointing lack of investment and staffing within college ministry work. But some methods remind us that a large investment alone will not produce a strategic, impactful ministry.

For example, one widespread method by which some organizations *do* make a sizeable investment in college ministry is the creation of a large, mid-week worship service meant to draw college-age individuals (and sometimes young adults) from throughout the city. While some “city-wide” Bible studies have achieved success and true effectiveness, this “big bang” approach is only *rarely* the best tactic for a ministry attempting

to reach young people.

Based on the history of successful city-wide services, my own observations, and other factors, I believe that two scenarios offer the most promise for effectiveness here. In the first case, a large worship service grows organically, as a smaller Bible study fits a need in its community and draws a crowd as a result. Other times, a city-wide service might be designed to fit the specific needs of a local campus or the city, after those needs have been wisely assessed.

Sadly, many groups seem to follow neither of these paths. For instance, a city-wide service may be used to jump-start a new or ailing ministry. Often this approach takes a heavy investment in time and resources but produces little ultimate fruit. And even when poorly strategized worship experiences do happen to endure for years or draw large numbers, one wonders if planning better on the front end or hiring an actual college minister might have ultimately impacted students more effectively.

A second, similar concern involves national ministries, large churches, or other well-financed entities that appear to enter a campus “out of the blue” and proceed to minister without regard for the present work taking

place. These college ministries are often accused of “stealing” students and student leaders from other local ministries, drawing students to a trendy experience with little substance, or being less contextual and strategic than is necessary. While others’ impressions of these ministries are certainly not always accurate, it is still clear that new college ministry efforts must enter the mission field humbly and carefully. The original planning for any new campus mission should take all present ministries and God’s prior work into account.

A third example of potential mis-financing comes from the extreme ease with which college ministry fundraising can take place – without proper evaluation of the work being done. Clearly, much fundraised ministry (including several major campus-based ministries) has strong oversight. But in other cases, independent individuals or entire ministries can draw thousands of dollars from well-meaning donors with little or no oversight or evaluation of their ministry undertakings. It distresses me that there are few safeguards to make sure available donations are matched with college ministries that are actually *healthy*. Without a developed field, however, safeguards are few and far between.

Finally, a fourth way finances can be used ineffectively is through mis-staffing our college ministry work.

Sometimes, for example, it is assumed that a young leader is automatically fit for this sort of demanding role, whether as a volunteer or paid minister. Or Christians successful in other ministries – like youth ministry – might be assigned this task without proper assessment or training. Often, this happens indirectly, as college ministry is simply lumped together with youth ministry, young adult ministry, or other areas which are not as similar to college ministry as some people assume. Sadly, this sort of mis-staffing appears to take place in both local ministries and national organizations alike, as well-meaning leaders do not always recognize the specialized needs and situations of this area.

Right now, these sorts of unwise investments seem uncomfortably common. Good use of finances and personnel is important here, as with any field of ministry.

danger from “our own ranks”

As long as the field of college ministry remains underdeveloped, we should also be concerned about the ever-present danger of unhealthy ministries themselves. Historically, not all college ministries have been backed with good theology and/or wise practices – and the results have been famously disastrous. Based on what I have seen and heard, unhealthy ministry continues to appear on campuses with regularity.

College students long to belong, lack theological acumen and the wisdom of years, hunger for spiritual experiences, and look up to knowledgeable authorities and even popular fellow students. So they can easily be drawn to ministries or activities that might ultimately harm them.

Extreme cults are the biggest concern, of course, and college students are especially susceptible to their lure for the reasons mentioned above. But simply *unhealthy* Christian college ministries can be nearly as harmful as cults, yet they are harder to spot. They also may attract large numbers, can be well-financed by supporters, and are often zeal-producing among leaders and students. Meanwhile, even generally solid college ministries at times adopt or attract unhealthy practices, errant teachings, or problematic leaders.

It is important that readers understand that these problems are quite common. Arising from both leaders and students in areas of both teaching and practice, unhealthy ministry occurs on campuses on a regular basis.

Another way college ministry can be unhealthy is simply through *ineffectiveness*. A “land-grabbing” college ministry mentality seems to exist in some quarters, as local Christians recognize the void of collegiate impact



(36) Other religions recognize the influence available by reaching college students. These Mormon missionaries are engaging members of the Tarheel tribe in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

(37) Ministry among Harvard's Crimson tribe can be very difficult, not only because of its New England location and intellectual climate, but because of problems with past unhealthy college ministries. In the late 20th century, authoritarian discipleship and aggressive recruitment by the International Church of Christ movement rightly caused great concern among campus administrators at many of America's colleges. The problems were especially severe in the Boston area.



(35) Large “city-wide” worship services, like The Well of Calvary Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, can be quite effective for serving students. But often Christian leaders assume that this success can be easily reproduced, even without strategic development – or *should* be reproduced, even without careful evaluation of their own context.

and respond with passion – but not necessarily with wisdom. On any single campus, that can mean that local churches, campus-based ministries, local individuals, or students may begin attempts at ministry without much regard for the needs of the specific campus involved. This is not the most productive scenario and can even harm specific ministry and the overall cause of Christ, yet it appears to be prevalent.

health and development are connected

As long as college ministry remains “out of sight, out of mind” for the bulk of American Christianity, cults, unhealthy ministries, unhealthy practices, and ineffective ministries will continue to be commonplace on college campuses. In the present state of the field of college ministry, it is very difficult to protect students from such things – at least until they have wreaked a great amount of havoc.

In a time when college ministry is underdeveloped, when there aren’t “best practices” and accepted wisdoms and “standard bearers” in the field, most leaders and students can only practice ministry in whatever ways seem right in their own eyes. Further, an undeveloped field of ministry means very little attention is paid to the history of college ministry (even by college ministers themselves). So we don’t recognize the extent of

the danger posed by unhealthy practices and beliefs, and we may find ourselves allowing or repeating the same errors again and again. Scars still remain – in former students, on campuses, and within entire denominations – because of past unhealthy ministries and cults that have deeply harmed students. It is clear to me that we are in danger of more scars, as long as the field of college ministry remains underdeveloped.

Clearly, Christians will never completely agree on every method for best reaching students or every point of doctrine. But a better-developed ministry field would guard against the harms caused by truly unorthodox positions, dangerously imbalanced focuses, potentially harmful practices, and simply ineffective approaches.

we don't need just "a little bit better"

While in this chapter I have presented the concerns that appear to surface in college ministries most often, my aim is not to paint every local ministry with a broad brush. Because each campus is a tribe of its own, every interested Christian should look at their own local colleges in light of what I suggest. Only then can they determine whether these deficiencies are evident there.

But it certainly appears that the field of college ministry as a whole is underdeveloped. Instead of being on the

cutting edge, much collegiate work remains in "maintenance mode" or, worse, "survival mode." But the world keeps changing, and we run the risk of not maintaining or surviving for long. The absence of Christian ministry among college students would be a disaster.

As we look at the campus mission fields before us, we should remember the situation of international missions in Carey's day, when Christians doubted the need to act purposefully to reach the world for Christ. We

Much of our work remains in "maintenance mode" or, worse, "survival mode."

are not in need of doing college ministry "a little bit better"; the situation now, like the situation Carey saw, is in tremendous need.

We need to close the wide Collegiate Attention Gap, the chasm in our concern

for one of the most important periods of people's lives. We need to invest in and staff college ministry to a far greater extent. We need to work for momentum, developing resources for improvement and helping college ministers stand on the shoulders of older, wiser ministers. And we need to check unhealthy and ineffective ministry before it further harms students and wastes resources. In other words, Christians must develop the

field of college ministry into a more effective instrument for God's Kingdom.

But I believe we are ready to do this. As I have noted before, it appears many American Christians have a growing concern to reach college students and make college ministry stronger. If that's true, then we have only seen the tip of the iceberg of what God will accomplish through His people. There is much more brilliance, excellence, and success to be found for this ministry field. Its brightest days are ahead.

In case there is any doubt that this is a worthy mission, Chapters 5 and 6 explore why we *should* use means to impact collegians. If you need that encouragement, feel free to skip ahead. But in Chapter 4, I will present one idea that can change our present course.

Our claims to be Kingdom-minded and to love these young people are proven or disproven by our attention to this vital group called college students. In many ways, we aren't doing what we could.

But that can change.



(39) It might surprise some that the century-old University Presbyterian Church in Seattle probably has the most influential church-based college ministry in the nation. UPC ministers to hundreds of students in a weekly study called "The Inn," involves a large number of adult church members, and connects likeminded college ministries through the national Ascent Network.



(40) One of the most powerful experiential arguments for strong, developed college ministry comes when campuses face great tragedy. At those moments, effective college ministry has an opportunity to serve the campus like never before. Here, campus tribes memorialize their own from the Virginia Tech Hokies (the lower stones in main picture), the Huskies of Northern Illinois University (left), the Thundering Herd of Marshall (top right), and the Aggies of Texas A&M (bottom right).

4

reaching the campus tribes

After ten years of college ministry involvement, a single idea has ultimately connected much of what I have learned. Nearly every major discovery from those experiences and my nationwide research fits nicely under one “umbrella,” a specific model for understanding college ministry better.

That overarching notion is to approach college ministry as *missions*.

college ministry as missions

Seeing college ministry as “missions” doesn’t simply refer to the need for evangelism on college campuses. Missions is much more than that. Just like foreign missionaries, *campus* missionaries not only get to intro-

duce Christ to the unsaved but also help bring Christians to maturity, shape the worldview of Christ-followers, raise up and train lifelong leaders, glorify God throughout local regions, and work to establish lasting, influential outposts of Christ’s Kingdom to permanently serve these mission fields.

Scattered college ministries throughout the U.S. do make use of missions principles and missions language, and I am not the first to compare these two ministry fields. At the same time, few people approach college ministry in a *comprehensively* missiological way.

This chapter will explore just how closely the practice of college ministry does and should parallel the way Christians do international missions. This model can radically adjust our thinking, embolden our efforts, and answer many of our questions about reaching college campuses for Christ – whether we serve in college ministry or help send people to this task. It’s a perspective that can help all of us: national parachurch ministries, denominations, seminaries, Christian colleges, Christian organizations, just about *any* church, individual college ministers, and the students they reach.

And it all begins by acknowledging the few thousand tribes spread throughout our nation.

missions means contextualization

After visits to so many of our nation's schools, one of the clearest realities that emerges about different college campuses is that they are, in fact, different. Each campus – from the community college down the street to the large state school – has its own context and culture, and these are fundamental elements that should influence how Christians reach each mission field.

In other words, college campuses are a lot like *tribes*.

Campuses certainly have tribal names: Hoyas and Buffaloes, Crimson Tide and Thundering Herd, Blue Devils and Sun Devils, Griffins and Billikens, Spartans and Aztecs and Fighting Irish and Fighting Illini and Vikings and Vandals. Each is a tribe of people in need of being reached for Christ.

Like any tribe, each campus has a particular *context* that affects the ways it will be reached best. For example, large metropolitan areas, mid-sized cities, and true “college towns” are all separate contexts that require different college ministry approaches. A community college is a context of its own, as is a medical school or other training institution. In a large city with many campuses, the presence of a “focus campus” – like the University of Washington in Seattle, or Ohio State Uni-

versity in Columbus – changes the context; large cities without one “focus campus” – Dallas, Boston, Washington, D.C., etc. – require different strategies (and can be far more difficult for college ministry). Schools with a Quarter System calendar require different ministry methods than colleges using semesters. Christian colleges require a very special sort of ministry. Campuses in the Northeast are different from those in the Deep South, which are different from those in the Midwest.

These are fundamental elements that should influence how Christians reach each mission field.

With nearly endless contextual possibilities, each tribe presents unique circumstances that affect how we engage it for the cause of Christ.

Each campus has its own tribal *culture*, too. Politically liberal campuses are different than conservative ones. Spirited campuses function differently from schools less interested in school pride. Schools with high levels of on-campus activity are culturally distinct from colleges less invested in student life. Schools well-known for science training are different than schools with a strong artistic emphasis. Traditions, history, ethnic diversity, geographic diversity, academic rigor, size, student organi-

zations, selectivity, financial cost, campus policies, and much more also affect the culture of a campus tribe.

The most interesting examples of tribal diversity occur within single states: Texas A&M University's tribe called Aggies has a very different culture and context than the Longhorns of the University of Texas. The University of Washington and Washington State University have distinct tribal differences, as do Auburn and Alabama. So do Harvard and MIT and Tufts and Cambridge College and Boston College, even though they're all accessible from the same subway system.

The contextual and cultural differences between college campuses should always affect how we present Christ and seek to establish ministry. We should reach them uniquely, much like we would reach various international tribes. That doesn't mean there aren't similarities between some campus tribes, just as we find parallels between foreign mission fields; those comparisons allow for shared wisdom. Nor do I mean to imply that campuses are homogeneous units. Both foreign and campus tribes have segments of people that divide along various lines, and this must be explored as a key part of the contextualization process.

The key principle here is that each campus should be



(41) The Wolverines of Grove City College make their way across campus.



(43) Some campus tribes draw specific affinity groups. These include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (such as Grambling State, above) and Catholic schools like Notre Dame (right).



approached and studied in ways that acknowledge its individuality. Instead of demanding students fit the ministry tactics we prefer to use (or the methods we are already familiar with), we must reach them in ways specific to their tribe. Understanding college ministry as missions means that *contextualization* is key.

missions means difficulty

Whether we like it or not, reaching these campus tribes effectively can be a very difficult undertaking. There are numerous obstacles in college ministry: difficult school administrations, disinterested students, uncommitted students, moral failures, lack of resources, lack of help, a short time frame in which to impact students, weariness among ministers, slow growth, unhealthy ministries, other religions and cults, difficulty raising awareness of the ministry, and so on.

Many of the college ministers I meet show signs of fatigue and discouragement – and who can blame them? Not only do they face all the difficulties listed above, but there is a particular sort of loneliness in this pioneering task.

Yet these same ministers are often profoundly encouraged when they realize that college ministry truly is a sort of *missions* – and that they are *missionaries*.

Why? Because that outlook properly frames the struggles they're facing. They suddenly realize that in the context of missions, all these struggles seem, to put it bluntly, *normal*. Though this realization won't solve their problems, it eases the discomfort at finding such awkward difficulties in their ministry efforts.

Just like college ministers, international missionaries face difficulty with local leaders, disinterested or uncommitted tribe members, moral failures, lack of resources and help, personal weariness, slow growth, unhealthy ministries, false religions, difficulty raising awareness, and other struggles. These things are *common*. This is the *stuff* of missions. This is what missions books and biographies are written about, what makes missions the adventure that it is. And for thousands of years, God has overcome these troubles on mission fields throughout the world – brilliantly, powerfully, and through His people.

So as American Christians decide whether to invest in reaching another sort of tribe – the college campus – we may see a difficult road ahead. But as we all realize that college ministry is missions, we recognize that what we're facing isn't strange. We realize that this adventure is what we sign up for when we sign up for campus missions, and its difficulties simply set the

stage for God to show His amazing strength. This work has always required God's miraculous intervention; realizing that this is missions underscores that fact.

missions means strategy

As we realize how difficult building the campus mission can be, we realize we need the same sort of strategy so often employed by other missionaries. As they face their grand and important task, God has revealed brilliant thoughts and ways to international missionaries. I bet the same is true for us.

I've had friends who traveled overseas at much expense, ultimately to spend most of their mission trip simply preparing for *future* mission work – mapping a village, perhaps, or developing basic relationships with local people. Why? Because those short-term missionaries took part in a much larger plan. They were accomplishing an important assignment within a months – or years-long endeavor to reach a people group.

Since tribes can be so unique and the problems faced in reaching them can be so large, *strategy* is important for reaching them best – whether in international missions or American college ministry. It would be ridiculous to think that we could take a “mission in a box” that works well in Australia and try to use it, without

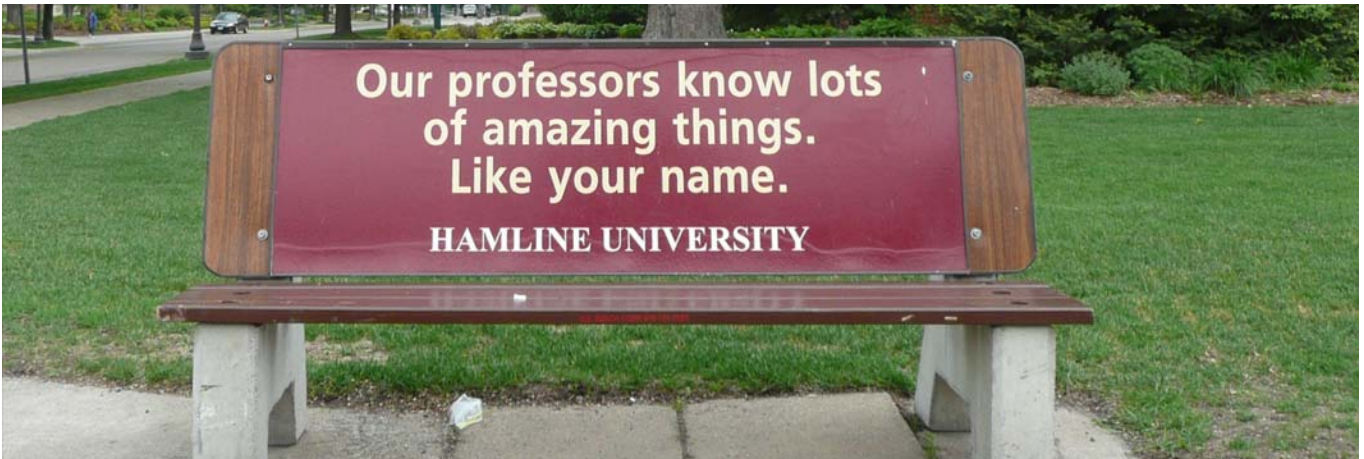
changes, in Argentina. The same proves to be true for reaching Bruins or Bobcats.

Yet many Christians still view college ministry as basic Christian Education instead of missions. So strategy may be placed on the back burner – if it’s considered at all – while we simply “try something” and hope students come to us. But that model doesn’t fit very well with the way campus-reaching actually works today.

Don’t get me wrong; some college ministries will best serve students by discipling those who simply show up – when that choice is strategically made. But we also need plenty of Christians spreading God’s Kingdom within the campus tribes. And as we do, we must do it

strategically.

The truth is, even the best college ministries aren’t reaching nearly the number of students they would like to see impacted for Christ. Large pockets of students seem quite out of reach. We continue to have little to no plan for helping students through the infamous transitions before and after college. New college ministries seem to have a remarkably high failure rate. Many college ministries that do last ultimately duplicate others’ ministry, make little lasting impact, or both. Some major cities, filled with hundreds of thousands of students on several campuses, still don’t have much college ministry success. Commuter campuses continue to confound us. Cooperation between ministries eludes



(46) Campus dynamics affect the mission field in many ways. The Pipers obviously require different mission work than the nearby enormous Golden Gopher tribe, though both are in the Twin Cities.

us, and hurtful competition is far too common. Moral failures and theological errors continue to beset non-Christian and Christian students alike.

All these challenges cry out for God-given *strategy*, developed with the same effort and ingenuity we've devoted to international missions strategy over the last few centuries. Both of these ministry fields require heaping helpings of God's brilliance. So the same sort of strategy work expected in international missions should also be the forte of college ministry. We need ideas. We need brilliance. We need breakthroughs. We need creativity.

Of course, this need for creative strategy requires that those who "send" college ministers as missionaries to the campus allow them to be strategic. The expectations for college ministers to fit predefined roles can hinder creative approaches to reaching the campus tribe. A ministry's ultimate strategy may be simple or surprising, recognizable or revolutionary. Every strategy, should, of course, be justified. But we should also

Strategy may be placed on the back burner ... while we simply "try something" and hope students come.

work to make it genius.

missions means patience

Because college ministry is naturally such a strategic endeavor, another area it parallels missions is in the need for *patience*.

Think about international missionaries who have a passion to reach a certain group of people. Once they arrive on the mission field, wouldn't they rather be *witnessing* than learning the language or translating the Bible? Shouldn't they be preaching on the street corners rather than mapping a village? Can't they just meet people and share Christ and teach and disciple?

While those opportunities tug at many missionaries' hearts, poorly planned and poorly developed activity doesn't always bode well for long-term success. We want our international efforts to reach people for years and decades to come, even if it means missionaries must spend time up front planning a mission and laying its foundation. Speed and longevity are not always mutually exclusive, but oftentimes they might be.

Most Christians don't need convincing on this point when it comes to foreign missions, because we have seen that this methodology bears the best fruit over

time. So when we send a missionary to foreign lands, it is possible he will come back a year later with little in the way of actual *numbers* to report.

“We’ve developed some relationships with people in the village,” he might say. “We have located ‘people of peace’ there, including gaining favor with some chiefs of the tribe!” As he gives his report to our church from the pulpit, he tells us, “We haven’t drawn any crowds or even any converts yet, but we’ve developed a plan to begin a Bible discussion group in the coming year.”

What do we do when we hear a report like that? We celebrate! We praise God for His blessing on this mission! We send that missionary back, and we’ll give him even *more* support if we possibly can!

If a college minister reports the exact same thing to *his* boss after the first year, he might be looking for a new job the next day.

Sadly, misunderstandings about the way college ministry progresses are very common for both new college ministers and their overseers. The assumption is often that a good ministry attempt will begin to draw people immediately. But understanding college ministry as missions means recognizing that a strong mission to a

campus will probably take time to develop and bear obvious fruit. Expecting quick growth – including numerical growth – is a big (but common) error.

initial slow growth is normal

College ministers and those who oversee them must understand that slow growth is *normal* and indeed often *necessary*.

In international missions, it takes time for connections to be made, for important truths to sink in, for a minister to get to know the context and culture, for language to be learned, for strategy to be developed, for trust to be earned, for life to be shared, and for God to prepare the missionary herself for the task ahead.

Many new college ministries also naturally grow slowly, too – for many of these same reasons! Just as with missions efforts, it takes time for word of mouth to spread on a college campus. It takes time for spiritual foundations to be built. It takes time for a new college minister to learn the campus tribe and its particular “language.” It takes time to build relationships, a major key for impacting college students. It takes time for the campus missionary to prepare personally for the marvelous pioneering task ahead.

In fact, if those things don't happen, it is unlikely that the ministry will be a valuable addition to the campus tribe. Any college ministry that *quickly* settles on its target audience, mission statement, core group of students, major goals, or other fundamentals should question whether it has done sufficient work to learn the campus tribe, build meaningful relationships, and develop the ministry strategy. Certainly, many elements of a new college ministry may be derived from other ministries. But how those elements are formed and fit together should be as unique as the mission field itself.

Since there is no “college ministry in a box,” college ministry formation that is both quick *and healthy* will be rare. College students may be drawn to a singular personality, flashy programs with little substance, or unbalanced teaching more quickly than to a healthy, holistic, purposeful, and “in-this-for-the-long-haul” college ministry.

Other factors also contribute to slow college ministry growth. For one thing, the “life expectancy” of those reached is only about *four years*, due to graduation. And those students lost each graduation usually include leaders who have provided the backbone for the ministry. Further, college ministries face the unique challenges of school year cycles, awkward student



(47) Brown University, though originally Baptist, has like many schools turned away from its Christian roots. On the day of my visit, the annual “Sex Power God” event took place. SPG is an on-campus event sponsored by Brown’s Queer Alliance that draws hundreds of students and encourages sexual participation and experimentation. Reaching tribes like the Bears effectively will require strategy – alongside a deep respect for the people we want to impact.

(44) The Vikings of Chicago’s North Park University are a superb example of contextual distinctiveness. The tribe inhabits an urban setting, has a strong Swedish heritage, serves as the only undergraduate school of the Evangelical Covenant Church, and has a far larger spiritual life staff than most Christian colleges.



(49) Designated or traditional “free speech zones,” like The Pit at the University of North Carolina, are key locations in many campus tribes. These sites can be valuable for connecting with students, observing important tribe activity, and conducting ministry efforts.

(50) The original Freebirds World Burrito has served the Gaucho tribe in Santa Barbara since 1987. The restaurant spread to the Aggie tribe of College Station, Texas, in 1990 and has since become one of the most well-known collegiate hangouts in the Southwest.



schedules, and administrative hurdles. These things don’t mean a college ministry can’t grow large eventually; many present college ministries reach several hundred students or more each week. But these factors do often cause growth to be delayed in the beginning years of the campus mission.

Based on my own experiences and my encounters with numerous ministries, I believe a college ministry generally needs two or three years to form its identity, strategy, core audience, and campus reputation. So before that time, evaluating a ministry should be done particularly carefully; its numerical growth during that period may not be a good indicator of its future success. Much growth may not take place until after two or three years have passed – at least. It is particularly sad, then, that many college ministries don’t make it to that point – often because of a misunderstanding about these very truths.

But this is not simply a wholesale dismissal of numbers as a measurement of success. Numbers, growth, and visitor retention always show us *something*. But the key with both of these parallel ministries – international missions and college ministry – is to examine the numbers in light of a real understanding of how these specialized types of ministry work. A desire to reach col-

lege students must be matched with a willingness to wait – just as we are willing to give worldwide missions efforts a chance to thrive.

a better evaluation

As I encourage patiently waiting for numerical growth, I don't want to imply that every strong college ministry will ultimately gain a large following. Nor should that be the aim for every ministry. There are many small ministries that impact college students quite well.

Of course, “large” and “small” are relative terms, too, based on geography, context, campus culture, and ministry history. We should also remember that because new students arrive annually, even a small ministry that is built to last can impact hundreds or thousands of students during the course of the mission.

The best evaluation for each college ministry is to determine whether we are doing the best we can do with the situation we have. As we seek God's wisdom, He may very well lead us to small niches within a campus or incredibly large numbers of students. Whether

A desire to reach college students must be matched with a willingness to wait.

“large,” “small,” or somewhere in between, we must simply make sure that we are actively progressing toward having the *best* ministry we possibly can.

missions means aggressive progress

It is *this* area – progressing as a campus mission – in which even the largest college ministries seem to struggle. On the opposite side of the concern about impatience with new college ministries, there is a danger of established ministries becoming complacent. Just as newer ministries are often too harshly judged based on their small size, some better established ministries seem to assume too quickly that their relatively large size, longevity, or level of support automatically indicates health and quality. But many large or long-lasting ministries still may lack the very things I noted in the last chapter, such as strategy, collaboration, successful preparation of students for post-college life, and health.

Based on my conversations and observations, I fear that some developed college ministries no longer place a high priority on regularly improving and gaining “momentum” from year to year. As in missions around the world, it is absolutely necessary that college ministries make aggressive progress to continue to fulfill their role in the campus tribe.

By “progress,” I don’t simply mean numerical growth – although that can certainly result from becoming an even better ministry (while some ministries will lose attendance as they grow better!). There are many other ways a college ministry might make progress:

- ⊕ impacting students more deeply
- ⊕ becoming a healthier ministry
- ⊕ more creatively impacting the campus
- ⊕ better reaching the entire mission field (including under-reached student groups, faculty, administration members, and even the surrounding community)
- ⊕ better preparing students for life after college
- ⊕ better helping freshmen transition into college
- ⊕ better complementing and cooperating with other campus ministries
- ⊕ and so on

Because they do face a rapidly changing audience (with nearly complete turnover every four to five years), college ministries may need regular major adjustments – not only to progress as a ministry, but even simply to keep from declining in their impact. From the beginning of a ministry, its leaders and supporters should plan on a lifetime of strategic modifications in response to changing students, a changing campus, a growing



(55) Passion Conferences has been one of the most influential national college ministry efforts, in large part because it has focused on doing only a few things well. Passion began its recent Regional Tour at Boston University in October 2007. This was possibly the largest gathering of evangelical students in New England ever.

(53) Major changes, such as the institution of a new football program, affect the dynamics of a tribe – and therefore ministry to it.



(52) Student centers, like the ones celebrated within the Wolverines tribe, provide powerful arenas for ministry among campus tribes. Not all campuses have strong central meeting places, however.

understanding of the tribe, and God's work within the ministry and its leaders. This doesn't mean leaving behind a ministry's core principles and God-given vision, but it does mean connecting those things with successive generations of college students.

From the beginning of a ministry, its leaders and supporters should plan on a lifetime of strategic modifications.

Many college ministers express a discouragement over the number of students left entirely unreached by *any* of the present college ministries at their campus. But without new models, methods, and momentum, millions of U.S. college students will continue to be completely untouched by Christian impact.

missions means aiming for longevity

Another way college ministry parallels mission work is in the value of long-lasting ministries. Our hope should be to build ministries that serve as powerful campus missions for decades to come.

College ministries often benefit from a lengthy tenure. For one thing, a campus ministry or church-based

group that is widely known as effective and established will receive positive word-of-mouth from students, campus staff, the community, alumni, and others who hear about its work (even from far away). Relationships grow deeper over time, too. Strategy and contextualization become more and more fine-tuned. And even when a ministry isn't the largest ministry on its campus each and every year, it may have an easier time staying "in the mix" as a staple in that campus tribe.

The net result of longevity is also a pretty powerful statistic. While other ministries may at times steal the spotlight, a consistent, long-term college ministry can ultimately impact a much larger number of students. Plus, a long-lasting mission effort not only gets to impact collegians, but eventually its influence can extend to faculty, administration, and other "locals" as the ministry becomes an integral part of the campus and even the city.

But the *patience* discussed above is usually required for ministries to be "built to last." When college ministers and their supporters aren't afraid of slow growth, they have the freedom to focus on building for longevity. Just as in foreign missions, it seems far more prudent to strive for long-lasting ministries than for immediate "results." While God sometimes sees fit to provide rapid

growth, the mindset and actions needed for building to last will be different from those involved in aiming for rapid success.

missions means investment

As I mentioned in the last chapter, our poor investment in college ministry continues to be one of the most disappointing aspects of our response to the campus tribes. But when we compare college ministry with missions, we discover better investment strategies.

Our usual investment in college ministry follows the pattern used for other life stage ministries. Consider, for example, how churches might invest in youth work:

- ⊕ We begin with a part-time staff member, or even get a volunteer to help disciple our kids.
- ⊕ After a while, if the youth group grows larger, we might look to make that person full-time.
- ⊕ With even higher attendance, maybe we add a secretary, interns, or other paid leaders to the youth ministry.
- ⊕ As even more students get involved, we might hire an associate, like a Junior High Minister.
- ⊕ And so we continue, investing more as the group grows larger. Meanwhile, the youth ministry budget grows in the same way, since the number

of students directly affects how much is spent.

This is a classic investment strategy for Christian Education, and it makes sense in those ministry fields. The primary focus is the “audience” coming to our group. The plan is in place, for the most part, and the amount of work and the budget required are fairly proportional to attendance size. The ministry simply scales as attendance increases, so we can begin with a small investment and add staff and resources as the group grows.

Because this makes so much sense for Christian Education ministries, we often invest in college ministry – on campuses and in churches – this way, too. If the group is small, the investment is small – small staff budget, small ministry budget. Once a college ministry “proves itself” by starting to grow, we’ll add to our investment.

From a Christian Education standpoint, it does make perfect sense. But this is one more way college ministry parallels *missions* far more than it parallels youth ministry or any other form of Christian Ed.

How do we tend to staff international missions efforts?

If at all possible, we start by sponsoring a person – or even a whole family or team – for full-time involvement

as they labor among a far-off people group. We make quite an initial investment in a ministry that, so far, has *no* audience – because the mission field itself (the population of that community or region) is the same size, regardless of how many people are reached.

But as the mission effort starts to see fruit, numerical growth doesn’t always require major additional investment. Why? Indigenous leaders are being raised up. Churches or other ministries are being built and can often help support themselves. Any additional work created by drawing a larger group can (and should) be handled by the very people being reached.

We all recognize that an *initial* sizeable investment makes sense for starting a mission effort, because that gives the missionaries the room to work. Missionaries have to, as noted earlier, spend time in strategy, in developing relationships, in learning the tribe, in praying, in training, in studying. All this happens even before a single convert is made. But without enough funding up front, these necessary tasks are much more difficult and take much longer – if they happen at all. But while the initial investment might seem relatively large, it doesn’t necessarily grow proportionally over time.

We use a different method of investment for missions

than we use for Christian Education because it fits the needs and reality of the ministry being accomplished.

College ministry needs the same approach.

It is clear that many individual college ministers don't have time to do much more than meet with a few students each week and "plan for Tuesday night" – or Sunday morning, or whatever time they hold their main activity. Because of a lack of investment from their overseers, a person may be the sole staff member in a job that requires additional help. Or, more often, these college ministers are volunteers, serve only part-time, or serve in several roles at once. So they simply have no room for planning the next month of their ministry, let alone developing its comprehensive strategy. In fact, the temptation is strong to jettison effective mission-

building in favor of fast numerical growth – so at least the students themselves can help carry the load.

It is notable that Campus Crusade for Christ, probably the most thriving college ministry in America, has traditionally started its ministries on campuses with entire teams. This powerful tactic of high initial investment corresponds with international missions efforts; there is often a need for "overinvestment" up front to see the best eventual ministry results.

Yet college ministry investment does not generally need to grow proportionally with the size of the ministry. Once a college ministry is established, it can quite successfully make use of a relatively small staff and many "indigenous" (student) leaders. Many of the largest college ministries in churches and on campuses



(56) The Assemblies of God promoted a missiological understanding of college ministry by declaring Chi Alpha to be a "campus mission" and moving its oversight from the denomination's youth department to U.S. Missions in 1986. National leaders feel the change has significantly aided Chi Alpha's growth since that time.

show that even a ministry drawing hundreds of students may not require a large paid staff or large budget in order to thrive.

“wait and see” doesn’t work

So investment similar to the way we invest in missions is needed. Leaders need room to think and explore and plan, *especially* at the start of a new or replanted college ministry.

So it’s frustrating that this is the time Christians are least likely to invest; we instead often choose a “wait and see” approach to funding college ministry efforts. We invest a little bit to get going – perhaps – but major investment comes only *after* major numerical growth.

What if we sent missionaries to foreign countries and promised to support them only *after* they had drawn a large number of people? This approach simply does not correspond with the reality or needs of most college ministries, either.

This mentality must change within denominations, in churches, within campus-based ministry efforts, and at Christian colleges. In each case, a certain level of investment might be needed *before* true success will be seen.

This doesn’t mean that every successful plan for reaching students will require a fulltime staff member, a team of paid individuals, or a large budget. It simply means that we should understand what is required to reach college campuses well. When we don’t have the resources to approach this mighty task on our own, we may need to investigate models that allow us to pool resources or complement efforts already taking place.

A certain level of investment might be needed before true success will be seen.

Whatever adjustments need to be made, this mission is worth our sacrificial investment. And that kind of investment will be necessary for this mission to work. It will always be difficult for 10 hours a week or

minimal funding to translate into viable, long-lasting mission work – whether that work is in South America or at the University of South Carolina.

missions means specialization

However, we must remember that significant investment in college ministry is not a cure-all. While I certainly hope Christians will begin using greater means to resource college ministry, investment always needs to be paired with wisdom.

Without wise mission-planning, a college ministry may be doomed from the beginning, yet college ministries continue to face regular failure because they are started without a specialized approach. This is an area where we must remember that college ministers are *missionaries*, and those who appoint them must commit to the planning, prayer, and processes worthy of that calling.

So another key part of commitment to missiological college ministry is understanding that this is a special environment that requires *specialized* approaches. This is important not only for local ministries to realize, but also for denominations, large parachurch ministries, and any others who hope to change the world by impacting students. Just as international mission work can be thwarted by well-meaning people unwilling to attend to the special nature of mission work, so college ministry is less successful when those practicing it don't realize the distinctive nature of the task.

For many Americans, the “college experience” is a singular moment, distinct from both their life in high school and their young adult years. Few people who attended college would claim otherwise.

Yet many local and national efforts too closely bind college ministry with high school ministry, young adult

ministry, or singles ministry. We will never realize our potential for effective college ministry if this is all we do. Certainly, some resources, training, and ministry will overlap between these fields and college ministry. But the *overall* approach to reaching college students must treat this as a specialized ministry.

Further, the men and women assigned to undertake this task must be, in a sense, *specialists*, just as we find in international missions. That is *not* saying that each collegiate missionary must be seminary-trained, have years of experience, or have amazing talents. But just as a foreign missionary (or even a short-term mission trip leader) would have some practice and training in mission work, anyone undertaking campus mission efforts must likewise “become a specialist.” This includes seeking out wisdom for the task, approaching it extremely purposefully, and spending much time getting to know college students. And this is especially true for regional and national collegiate leaders; if those who oversee and guide local college ministers aren't experienced in this specialized field, they will have difficulty providing the wisdom needed for this work.

Notably, this type of specialization is no different than what is often required for successful ministry to children, particular professions, urban environments, or

any of the other fields with unique needs, contexts, and cultures. Yes, the possibility of involving and impacting young people is alluring, but unless we recognize the special needs of college students, their culture, and the skills required to impact them well, our work will be less effective than it could be.

missions means cooperation

Finally, understanding college ministry as missions also indicates that *cooperation* is both crucial and fruitful.

The need for cooperation is simply a reality. There will probably be no time soon when parachurch organizations disappear from campuses, when churches place all their collegiate discipleship in the hands of campus-based groups, when multiple local college ministries combine into a single outpost reaching the campus, when all students attend Christian colleges, or when any other plan removes the need for cooperation between ministries. (Nor is it clear that any of these approaches would be healthy or best.) If this is our reality now, then cooperation – at some level – is crucial.

But cooperation is not merely essential; it can also be incredibly *fruitful*. By working together – wisely – ministries can often do more together than they can do separately. This may be particularly true in college min-

istry, when “critical mass” can bear particular importance in drawing college students, attracting support, and raising up qualified student leaders. Likewise, vital college ministry needs – such as strategy, creativity, collaboration, resources, and administration – may be more easily accomplished when ministries work together. Instead of duplicating activity, ministries can better complement and supplement each other’s work.

Isn’t this what we have found in international missions? Foreign missionaries face the same scenario we face in college ministry – multiple Christian groups often working within geographical proximity. So they often decide that some efforts are best performed cooperatively. Their examples of taking advantage of these realities can provide wisdom for us as we reach our campus tribes.

college ministry is missions

Even if outsiders to college ministry struggle to see college ministry as missions, a missiological view of college ministry has resounded with the very people who are best prepared to tell us its worth – college ministers themselves. In numerous conversations about these ideas, I’ve seen eyes light up and minds start racing as college ministers realized that their work is *missionary* work. This realization brings immediate hope, value,

and improvement to the practice of college ministry. So I hope I've outlined this missiological understanding of college ministry in such a way that not only college ministers but the rest of American Christianity can be helped by it.

For those ready for specific action steps, the last section of this book, the "Road Map," discusses how we can improve the field of college ministry and better treat this as a mission effort. But before I discuss where we can go from here, it's important to remind ourselves *why* this mission is worth our efforts, our time, and our investment. That is the focus of Chapter 5.



(60) The Navigators probably possess the most unique and beautiful headquarters of any national college ministry. Included on their Glen Eyrie property is the former castle-home of the founder of Colorado Springs.

(58) The Jumbos of Tufts have access to public transportation, like most of the numerous collegiate tribes in the Boston area. The extensive use of subways and buses (instead of cars) presents unique opportunities and challenges for ministry. (left)

5

the harvest is plentiful

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then completely stopped, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

I recognize that it does no good to ask American Christians to use greater means to reach college students if I can't argue for the importance of the task itself. Is college ministry worth the cost and effort required to participate in this unique missions engagement?

The truth is, I can't claim that ministering to college students is *always* a better use of time, energy, and resources for every Christian and every Christian organization. It isn't. The same is true with any ministry area,

including even international missionary work – which may be why William Carey didn't elevate missions *above* other forms of ministry in his *Enquiry*. He simply pointed out that missions:

- ⊕ Is vitally important
- ⊕ Is worth the effort and cost
- ⊕ Should be a priority for the whole of Christendom (even though individual people and churches will be involved in different ways)

My goal is to make the same case for college ministry.

ministry at the hinge

When I have opportunities to talk to youth about the difference between high school and college, I point out that college is, in a word, BIGGER. Everything about the college experience seems like a more crucial, more dramatic time of life than any that has preceded it. But this period also sets the stage for what's to come, because the college years require making choices and taking paths that affect the rest of one's life.

In other words, college is a “hinge” moment in many people's lives, a drastic, decisive period between the preparation that has come before and the “real world” that lies ahead.

So, while it makes perfect sense to invest heavily in preparing students during their years as children and youth (as Christians already do), it doesn't make sense to halt our investment at the exact moment the stakes are raised.

make it or break it

Everything about college puts individuals in a "make it or break it" season of life. Suddenly, dating matters more and means more in college than it has before – in no small part because it may lead to marriage. Friendships made during this time are likely to last for years or decades. College schoolwork, grades, and learning have far greater meaning than they did in high school. Decisions during college are both *plentiful* and have sweeping effects, as a student often decides life-altering things like his career path, spouse, lifestyle, church membership, denominational ties, spending habits, and future plans.

In college, the buffers of high school – family, authority figures, church, community, etc. – are often gone alto-

It doesn't make sense to halt our investment at the exact moment the stakes are raised.

gether. Sadly, that means that in this "make it or break it" season, college students regularly "break it."

College students don't have to look too hard for ample opportunities to wreck their lives – and not just on the well-known crags of premarital sex and alcohol abuse. Emotional issues – from eating disorders to depression to self-mutilation to suicide – are familiar on college campuses. Freshmen (and others) regularly flunk out of school. Debt from extravagant purchasing often accrues at an enormous rate for college students – on top of the debt brought on by the education itself. Drug use and other physically and mentally harmful activities flourish. Homosexuality is common and is often celebrated. Even more unique sexual activities are sometimes tried, as well. For Christians and non-Christians alike, these dangers often lead to deep emotional scars and other consequences that will be faced for a lifetime.

Dangers in the specifically spiritual realm also confront students during their college careers – and not only at secular schools. Students may be met with atheism, agnosticism, and criticism of their beliefs – and many Christian students are sorely unprepared for this. They can also be drawn to other religions, unhealthy Christian ministries, and cults. Pride, zeal-without-wisdom,

and other spiritual maladies are quite common, even among the “good kids.” For many other students, the spiritual downfall comes simply by way of a creeping apathy; by the time they finish college, large numbers of students are far removed from the passion and purity they knew in high school. And though Christian colleges do seem to provide a slight buffer from some dangers, certain temptations can be even *greater* at Christian schools.

I could go on and on about the “perils of college,” as could plenty of parents and pastors. While the dangers of higher education are sometimes overestimated (or at least too often focused on), it is true that college is a rigorous journey, and the adventure quickly turns nightmarish for many, many students.

an opportunity to “make it”

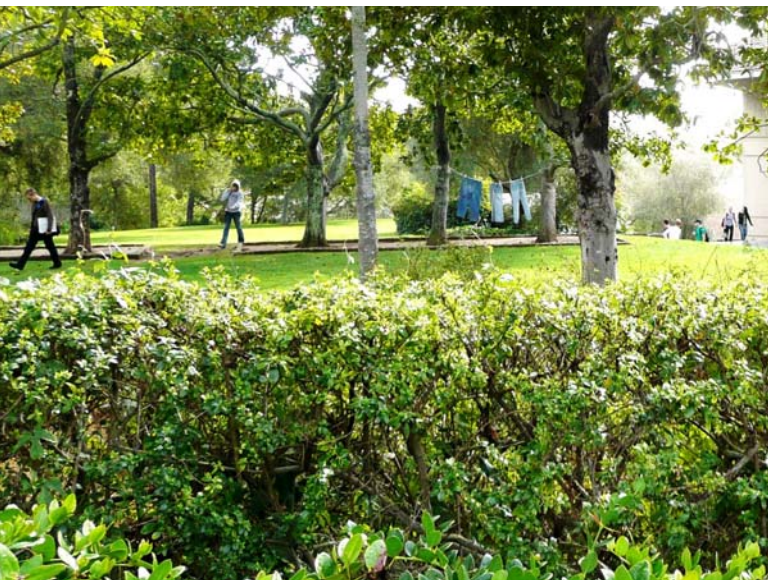
But that’s not the only reason college is a hinge moment. In this “make it or break it” time of life, there is also ample opportunity for college students to “make it” – because in college, students’ decisions and actions have bigger consequences, for bad *or* good.

This magnificent collegiate opportunity is why parents and other mentors, both Christians and non-believers, continue to encourage high school students to pursue a



(61) This beachside Bible study designed for the local surfing community is the product of partnership between First Baptist Church in Jacksonville and the local chapter of Christian Surfers International.

(63) The Eagle tribe of Asbury College has a history of several spiritual revivals that have involved a large percentage of the student body. Some of these revivals have drawn national attention and have spread to other campus tribes.



(64) Vegetation is one of the striking aspects of the property enjoyed by the Warriors of Westmont College. But neither natural beauty nor pairs of pants randomly hanging from clotheslines are particularly surprising sights when visiting a campus tribe.

college education when possible. We recognize that this is a unique moment for academic, social, and personal development. While there might be ways higher education can be improved, we are not wrong to recognize its immense value.

College is a time when students learn about themselves and take on their individual paths like never before. Students' talents and skills are often discovered and honed during the college years. They discover new passions – and often discard old hobbies. Leadership opportunities are widespread, as are opportunities to be part of large-scale, student-driven projects that might touch the entire campus, city, region, or world. The college campus possesses vibrancy and excitement found in few other places, and students often benefit from the incredible opportunities for academic, social, and emotional growth. What a place!

This new season of independence is also when many Christian students fully make their faith their own. For some of these students, college is a time of rededication to a faith that had long been ignored. Many other college students meet Christ for the first time. For both these new believers and longtime Christians, college can be a time of deepening intimacy with God and other Christians, far beyond what was known during

the high school years.

Finally, the spiritual opportunity in college extends to ministry undertakings; students are often capable of leading important ministries, making large commitments, and exerting unique levels of energy for Christ's cause. They also are in close relationship during college with numerous individuals – Christian and non-Christian – with whom they can make one-on-one impact on a daily basis.

College campuses are small cities, full of life and energy, full of potential being realized right before our eyes! It is a profound blessing to have the chance to live and work and minister among these campus tribes.

the great door before us

As just mentioned, one key reason the college years are so important for ministry is because of the immense opportunity to lead people to Christ. Obviously, many of the students who enter college aren't Christians. So one of the primary reasons for valuing college ministry is the immense opportunity it presents to obey the Great Commission.

While God always works as He sees fit, it does seem that many college campuses provide particularly fertile

soil for sharing Christ. Not only are college students still young, but much like the citizens of Paul's Athens or the interested Europeans reached by Francis Schaeffer, these individuals are often primed and willing to engage with deep things.

Even the very "hinge" nature of the college campus affords numerous occasions to help students find Christ. Major decisions, setbacks and crises, relationship concerns, and worries about the future all provide chances to share truth to listening ears. If we aren't seeking the

lost on college campuses, we are missing a unique opportunity we won't have again.

College ministry even gives us the chance to share Christ with the whole world.

And college ministry actually gives us the chance to share Christ with the whole world. With each new

freshman class, the nations arrive on our doorstep, even from places not easily accessible to American Christians. We have the opportunity – just by engaging in local college ministry – to serve citizens of those nations. What's more, many of these U.S.-educated students will be future leaders in their home countries.

Of course, all this evangelism must be practiced “with gentleness and reverence,” loving and respecting students enough to find out what they need and how best to proclaim the beauty of Christ to them. As college ministry gets better, our work in evangelism will, too.

a time to build

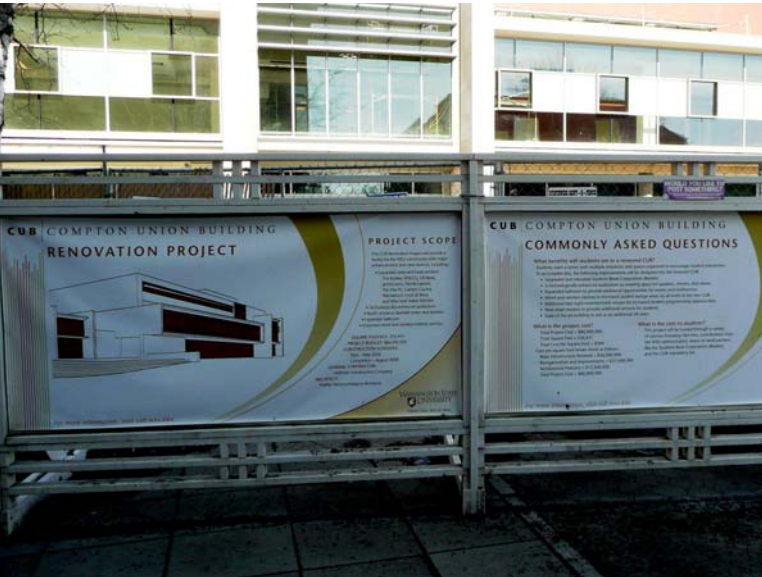
While certainly not every person chooses to attend college, over 17 million people are enrolled in American campuses at any one time. A large percentage of our population faces this powerful, four- or five-year hinge of life, with all its potential for both enormous success and devastating disaster.

And we get to connect with these people *right then*, in the middle of all this BIG-ness. We can help bring spiritual clarity, God’s direction, and Christ’s empowerment to the middle of bufferless independence, life-changing decisions, and enormous opportunities!

That’s why it’s so disappointing that Christians have left a wide gap in our attention and ministry to people at just this season of life. We set our sights mainly on *preparing* people for the rest of life (in youth ministry) and then “catching back up with them” on the other end, once they settle down a bit.



(66) This uniquely botanical student center belongs to the Grizzlies of the University of Montana. The table on the far right is part of Pride Week, a series of forums and activities discussing and celebrating the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersex, and Queer) community. Such events are extremely common on college campuses.



(67) Building projects seem to take place perpetually among campus tribes, often to replace or remodel buildings built decades ago. Here, the Cougars of Washington State University remodel their Student Center.

In other words, as we begin building young Christians, we spend money and energy for excellent foundations, using superb materials and maintaining abundant oversight. Then many of us use very standard (or even sub-par) materials for the building itself, with few expert builders on site during that process. Finally, only once the building is substantially completed, we go back to work, strengthening the house as best we can – even though our bricks and mortar and beams are already in place.

Why not make the beams strong in the first place?

while the fabric is woven

When we reach people during the college experience, we're not simply impacting them *earlier* rather than *later*, though that alone is a great reason for college ministry. This is also the period when the very fabric of people's lives is being woven. This is our single best chance to pair who they will be – as people, as spouses, as parents, as workers, as citizens, as church leaders – with God and the story God has written for them. At no other time will these people be growing so extensively, questioning so much, or deciding so many important life matters.

By ministering to college students, we proclaim truth in

the middle of the weaving. So as students are learning to be bankers, they're learning to be *Christian* bankers. As students are deciding to take Poli Sci 101, majoring in Engineering, or preparing for law school, they're doing it in light of God's direction and with the counsel of wise Christians. When students are studying the Arts or the human body or agriculture, they're getting to know the Creator behind these things. While students are navigating dating opportunities and fraternity parties and difficult roommates and non-Christian friends, they have God's word as their map and God's people as their prophets. And in all these things, we aren't simply providing "good tips" or devotional thoughts for students' college experience; we're connecting them to the gospel and its drastic implications for their lives.

Evangelical Christians are rightly concerned about portions of society that lack godly wisdom and influence. But where else can faith best be integrated with calling, except in the very spot in which calling is being hashed out, being developed, being learned? Yet at the exact time people are becoming skilled in every other way, we have largely ignored our duty to train them to follow Christ.

Perhaps these people will find this spiritual training later through churches, adult Bible studies, godly

friends, or good books. But by then, spiritual progress may be so long delayed (while people have progressed in every other area of life) that their spiritual stunting and compartmentalization may be grave. By that time, some will be in jobs and marriages and cities they should not have chosen; worse yet, *most* may lack a fully biblical mindset and worldview. Not all Christian students who remain untouched by college ministry

will emerge at cross-purposes with the gospel. But they may not be partaking in *Christ's* purposes by the time they enter the adult world, either.

Where else can faith best be integrated with calling?

We urge our children to attend college but haven't always followed them there. Do we really believe that reaching people ten years after this experience will provide just as much impact?

what if?

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then *completely stopped*, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

Remember, there are over 17 million college students in

the United States at any one time, with millions of new students replacing the newly graduated each year. What if, over the next five years, we helped college students radically connect with Christ like never before? What if our ministry was effective enough that whatever their profession, whatever their location, whatever their background, Christian graduates were ready to impact the world with purpose and passion?

Even if we only reached students really well for five years, wouldn't that "mini-generation" do remarkable things for the next fifty years or more?

Maybe it's easier to look back.

If the field of college ministry had been better developed a decade ago, Christianity as a whole would be better prepared to engage culture *right now*. What effect might millions of additional disciples have on major cultural discussions like abortion or homosexuality, if they had been taught *back then* to think biblically and act lovingly? What effect could those millions of passionate young adults have on world issues – hunger, disease, war, justice – if in the midst of college their hearts had been turned to serve the whole world both zealously and wisely? What effect would all those new, excited God-followers have in our churches?



(65) Campus tours, like this one at Boston College, are perpetual occurrences in the life of a campus tribe. Each tour presents a vivid reminder of the life-altering choice about to be made by each of these future college students.



(70) Two reasons for college ministry investment are the important role colleges play in society and the immense opportunity to serve international students. At top, the Wildcat tribe celebrates its key involvement in the U.S. Space Program. At Cal Poly, a ministry to Chinese students advertises on campus.

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Some of those former college students would be CEOs, analysts, and policy-makers in the midst of difficult financial periods. They would be politicians, analysts, and strategists in this interesting political time. They would be pastors. They would be professors. They would be media members, musicians, actors, athletes, and other celebrities. They would also be new moms and dads, community opinion leaders and community builders, school teachers and Sunday school teachers and youth ministers and foreign missionaries.

Even now, we see fruit from the college ministries that did serve students in the past decade. Many church leaders and other Christians can point to *college ministry* as a driving force in their spiritual development.

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then *completely stopped*, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

What if we ministered to college students really well for the next five years... and then never stopped?

the influence of college students right now

My hope isn't simply to push us to "do a little more college ministry." We need to develop our entire minis-

try field, growing the breadth, depth, and health of the practice of ministry to students. And if we do, the blessings we receive won't only come in the future.

Students can have a phenomenal effect on organizations and churches as a whole, as I will discuss below. But three key ministry pursuits will particularly benefit from using greater means for college ministry: youth ministry, young adult ministry, and missions.

better college ministry, better youth ministry

One way college ministry will bless us is through its impact on ministry to our youth. American Christians have for several decades placed a high priority on youth ministry. But if we will also begin increasing our efforts in college ministry, youth ministry will get even better.

First, a strong college ministry field will allow us to better structure and evaluate our present work with high school students. If we want youth ministry to produce lasting change, it is vital that we look to college ministry to help us understand what youth need for their next steps in life. Experienced college ministers can help us discern how best to prepare our kids to prosper after high school graduation.

Second, strong college ministries prepare the best youth ministry leaders – both for now and for the future. Churches and parachurch groups that have invested in college ministry have seen this fruit, because well-disciplined college students can fill their needs for youth ministry volunteers. These younger adults often connect with youth in a

The blessings we receive won't only come in the future. unique way, and they can speak with authority about the life stage high school students will soon enter.

The spiritual development of future youth pastors is also performed by college ministry. In many cases, youth pastors' first jobs come during or immediately after college. Don't we want those future youth pastors to connect deeply with Christ and Christian ministry during their college years? Without strong college ministry, solid youth leaders are much harder to find – so we risk having less than the best to offer our kids.

Third, the presence and strength of college ministries affect how well youth transition to college. Even specific choices like the college to attend, a church to join, and ways to get involved can be aided by college ministers' wisdom. College ministers can also help high school seniors and graduates get ready for the college

world through Bible study, counsel, and resources.

better college ministry, better young adult ministry

As I've traveled, I have been pleasantly surprised to find many churches newly focusing on ministry to young adults, a life stage that generally includes post-college individuals (single or married) in their 20s and early 30s. Christians do need to form better connections with this age group, and I'm glad some are already doing that. However, it is a mistake to aim for strong ministry to these young adults without also working for strong college ministry.

The reason successful college ministry is crucial for building strong young adult ministry is clear. Without purposefully *preparing* students to follow Christ in their 20s, it will be hard to find God-following college graduates to help build individual young adult ministries. 20-somethings often live in a new location, perhaps have a spouse or family, generally have an adult occupation, and face the other pressures of adult life. If we expect them to commit to Christian community after we have left a "gap" for them in the previous years, we may be disappointed. And even those who do seek community will lack the spiritual maturity they might have gained from strong ministry during their college years.



(72) Campus Crusade's ministry among the Wolfpack tribe in Raleigh is one of their largest in the nation. During this final meeting of the school year, leaders had graduating seniors rise. They then asked anyone who had been impacted by those seniors to stand with them, followed by others who had been impacted by those students and still others impacted by *that* group. The standing crowd provided a powerful visual illustration of the impact of those individual seniors – and the impact any younger student could have in the years to come.



(73) Spring Break mission trips are a staple of college ministry. While many of their friends flock to the beach, stay home, or otherwise relax, many college students serve locally, nationally, and internationally each spring. On this trip to Seattle, Cowboys from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, partnered with local ministries in various projects. The above activity involved promoting social justice issues among the Huskies tribe.

If instead we work now to produce college graduates who love God and love people, our young adult ministries will never lack for attendance, vibrancy, and maturity. Christians should be about the business of preparing students for “the real world” that follows college graduation, and we have that opportunity as college ministry is prioritized.

Another reason strong college ministry will help young adult ministry thrive is through the crossover of activities and resources; some of our work in college ministry will be useful in reaching young adults as well. By combining college ministry and young adult ministry efforts at appropriate times, we steward our investment wisely, help achieve “critical mass,” create environments for young adults to minister to college students, and may even increase the energy level and effectiveness of both ministries.

better college ministry, better missions elsewhere

As discussed throughout the book, I believe we should understand college ministry as *missions*. However, I never want to downplay the importance of our mission work around the world. (In fact, it is within college that my own love for missions was set in place.) The good news is that stronger college ministry will actually

strengthen local and foreign missions efforts.

Development of college ministry provides the *best* chance we have of deploying thousands of people to missions efforts in the coming years. It is young graduates who often have the most passion, availability, and willingness to spread God's fame among the nations. And even before graduating, many students who are not (presently) called to lifelong missions have opportunities to engage in short-term missions projects.

We already see phenomenal missions deployment from some college campuses and college ministries. I was fortunate to attend one of these colleges, and many of my former classmates have participated in long-term international mission work. Our efforts and investment to make college ministry stronger throughout the U.S. will only help add to the cause.

It is in the present generation *particularly* – the Millennial Generation – that we have an opportunity to draw students into this adventure of world missions. As the most service-minded generation in decades, this group of people may even have much to teach *us* about effectively impacting the globe.

But how will they go, unless they are sent? We have the



(77) The Aggies of Texas A&M might have seen the most extensive college ministry success of any campus tribe over the past two decades. Most well-known is the weekly, on-campus Breakaway worship service, which often draws several thousand students. But many other local ministries have seen great success during that time, too. Numerous recent graduates of Texas A&M have participated in international missions, seminary training, and other ministry avenues.



(75) While church-based college ministry is still comparatively rare, some churches, like First Presbyterian Church of Evanston, Illinois, do heartily welcome students. (left)



(74) It is actually common to find college bars named like this establishment, located near the University of Minnesota. Among other things, this label allows students' visits to remain hidden from parents.

opportunity to raise up Kingdom-advancing Christian young people during that period of life-preparation called “college.” Skipping ministry to these college students while we serve more “settled” Christians clearly undermines our goal to see missionaries sent all around the globe. If we use greater means in college ministry, we will have greater means for missions.

a farm team and far more

Of course, the same is true for other areas of Christian ministry, too. College ministry is a wide-open opportunity – probably our best

How will they go, unless they are sent?

opportunity – to build a strong supply of future pastors, worship leaders, elders, deacons, authors, speakers, educators, parachurch leaders, denominational leaders, and other Christian leaders for the generations coming behind us. Do we want young people to grow up sharing our beliefs while even *surpassing* our effectiveness? Then investing in them *now* is vital.

And not only does strong college ministry provide an effective ministry “farm team” for the future, it also provides Christianity with an *immediate* reservoir of passion, drive, and talent.

Right now, individual churches, our communities, and the worldwide Church can see amazing blessings from collegians. College students are capable of handling huge commitments and exerting astounding amounts of energy. Obviously, they can also be quite passionate. Plus they often have more “margin” to devote to causes they care about – with more free time, more disposable income, greater physical resilience, more flexible schedules, and fewer attachments and responsibilities than they may ever have again.

As some churches and other Christian organizations have already noticed, these ingredients allow college students to be an inordinate blessing to whomever will welcome them. Consider your own church and other Christian organizations you are familiar with. Imagine the potential for college students to impact these places. What would the influx of even a *dozen* dedicated, passionate, flexible, teachable college students mean to your group? What if you received far more over the next several years?

Many churches see this benefit even today. College students fill volunteer spots and even staff positions. These students impact our kids. They serve on committees or other ministry teams, providing a special sort of insight. When taught to do so, they give to the church

financially (often more than we would guess). They appreciate our families and our senior adults, they yearn for deep teaching, they bring their friends, and they sing – loudly. They can be passionate, attentive members (and leaders!) in our body, and that involvement can encourage a church more than we expect.

Besides church, other Christian organizations – from the local to the worldwide – would also do well to see the potential in this group. College students can be amazing participants, volunteers, brainstormers, catalysts, and advertisers. They want the truth we offer, the resources we create, and the services we present – as long as what we give them is relevant and authentic. Of course if it’s not, these college students can help us change for the better. Their involvement *will* help us change for the better.

There is a reason that secular companies target these college students, aiming to win them to their products and their brands long before these students make a splash in the “real world.” Shouldn’t we, who look with spiritual eyes, at least notice the level of potential that those companies see? Shouldn’t we, who have so much more to offer, at least reach out to college students as much as those companies do?

R&D

Finally, strong college ministry doesn't only bless us today and prepare individual college students for tomorrow, it provides a window into what the future of American Christianity will look like.

Many Christian leaders work hard to "know the times" and discern how we can best prepare for future influence. Fortunately, we have highly accessible laboratories to aid in this pursuit. They reveal both the approaching advantages for the Kingdom cause and the difficulties our faith will face in the near future. Both the future of society and the future of Christian ministry are on display each year at thousands of locations around our nation – college campuses.

Well-developed college ministry can truly be "R&D" for the Church.

R&D, shorthand for "research and development," describes an organization's investment in its future activities and products. R&D in any industry seeks to gain new understanding, or to better develop the understanding already attained. So organizations' future effectiveness and significance often *depends* on R&D.

For Christendom, college ministry is one of the best

possible "focus groups" for our future, because there is no better opportunity to gauge where both our faith and the culture are heading. We all recognize that the college campus is on the cutting edge of many aspects of society; it is college ministries that live out Christ's Kingdom at that cutting edge.

If we make college ministry a priority, we stand to be always at the front of the curve in our ministry efforts. With our support and attention, college ministers will be ready and able to tell us of the battles and beauties ahead for the Church at large, just as international missionaries often inform us of changes approaching from the rest of the world. Further, college ministers can also share ministry methods they have found useful for surfing these new waves.

If we make college ministry a priority, we stand to be always at the front of the curve in our ministry efforts.

Even now, the Millennial Generation has begun to flood the workplace and marketplace. (The oldest of this generation is around 25 years old.) And while youth ministers and even children's ministers have been able to give some description of the Millennials, it is only recently that we have

been able to see this group outside the protections of the teenage years. College ministers are on the front lines of connecting with this newest, *largest* American generation, and these pioneering leaders have wisdom to share with the church at large. The same will be true with the next generation, as well.

Ultimately, the attention Christians give college students and college ministry reflects our determination to be ready for our future – just as a company’s R&D investment helps indicate its preparedness for the days ahead.

the obligation

If we choose to place greater priority on college ministry for no reason other than to “catch up” with Christian work in other areas, that might be reason enough. We have clearly left an enormous gap in our efforts here, while we continue to place great emphasis on other areas: church worship services, cultural battles, technology, worship music, youth ministry, missions, and other important areas. At the very least, it would make sense to put college ministry “on the radar screen” for American Christianity.

But as we pause to think about the role college plays in the lives of so many individuals – and in the culture at

large – we realize that ministry at this “hinge” could make an impact that resounds through all areas of Christian ministry. In fact, strengthening college ministry will impact *each* of the other areas mentioned in the paragraph above: worship services, cultural battles, technology, music, and so on. By serving college students, we lay a foundation for growing stronger in all sorts of ways.

But even though using greater means for college ministry will ultimately bless the American Church in many ways, college ministry is not only *for us*. We don’t adopt these mission fields simply to fill in the gaps in our programming or to locate some great volunteers. We don’t even reach the campus tribes only to “invest in our future.”

We position ourselves among the collegians because God wants to be glorified there and because He loves the “natives” of these tribes. We work to bring college students the love of Christ in a scary and awkward and exciting moment of life. We offer Christ’s abundant life when students still have most of their years ahead of them. It is not only our future that is our concern, it is theirs.

We have an obligation to use greater means for impact-

ing collegians. There is great opportunity in the fields before us, a chance to win students to Christ, to serve campuses with His love, to claim extensive ground for God's Kingdom, to prepare for the future of Christianity, to hold back those staggering to slaughter, to strengthen those who are growing, and to see young people transition well from the nest of high school to the skies of the real world.



(79) The scenic, mountain-base location of Northern Arizona University helps foster a particularly nature-loving culture for the Lumberjack tribe. A specific niche ministry, the Lifelines outdoor experience ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, reaches the tribe in a special way.

(69) Campus tribes were one audience focused on by Barack Obama's campaign for President. This rally in April 2008 drew Tarheels and members of other local tribes (like the Blue Devils, Wolfpack, and Eagles), as well as many people from the greater NC Triangle community.





(80) Fighting abortion remains a social justice pursuit for many college ministries. At Louisiana State, Students for Life presents a memorial to boys and girls killed by abortion (main picture and left). Among the Vikings of Portland State University, a more graphic display requires ample notice in the middle of a busy campus.

6

practical concerns

Even though there may be strong reasons to prioritize college ministry, it still must be *practical* for the many churches, denominations, and parachurch groups who will be involved. So it's very important to address common concerns about taking on this task.

The most common objections to pursuing college ministry arise from the following areas:

- ⊕ The short time frame and transitory nature of the college years
- ⊕ Past difficulties experienced in trying to impact college students
- ⊕ Not enjoying the fruits of our labors, because students graduate and move on

- ⊕ The unspiritual or uninterested nature of collegiate culture
- ⊕ The financial cost involved, without receiving financial return from the students

We might assume these objections most often come from pastors and churches. But they can apply just as much to those in campus-based and Christian college settings, as well as to denominational leaders and members, parachurch participants, and anyone else who might consider connecting to the campus tribes.

I'll address these concerns in the following pages.

Why should we use greater means for college ministry, when students will be with us for only a few years (and somewhat sporadically even then)?

Additionally we might question if it makes sense to spend time developing *strategy* for our efforts. By the time a strategy is determined, won't the very students we hoped to impact already be nearing graduation?

Hopefully I can answer each of these questions.

First, the concern over only having a few years with students places undue *focus* on the *length* of the time

period rather than the *intensity* of those college years. During those four or five years, students often see spiritual, academic, emotional, and social growth to a far greater degree than in the several years prior to or following college. That means the college years provide a unique canvas in which spiritual training affects people deeply in a limited amount of time. Those who *have* been impacted by strong college ministries (like myself) can point to drastic growth in even *one* year's time – let alone four or five years.

This is also a hinge moment in a person's life, in which actions and decisions carry particular import for years or decades following college. So whether we encounter college students for a year or two or a bit longer, what we do during *these* years can affect them for a lifetime.

Notably, Christians rarely use this same concern as a reason to devalue high school ministry, though our students spend only four years in high school (which is shorter than many college careers).

Meanwhile, the concern about possibly wasting our efforts on strategy-building misses the fact that we are reaching entire *tribes* and not only individuals. While it is true that students themselves do turn over rapidly, the context and culture of a campus are much slower to

change. An effective, developed strategy doesn't have to be recreated for each new freshman class. Instead, the mission is carried out with new students, who both fill the shoes of those who have gone before them and connect to the mission in their own unique ways.

The limited time available shouldn't make us discard strategy, nor should it lead us to abandon the cause altogether. Our short time with students should highlight the importance of seeking God's brilliance for building college ministries that impact deeply and extensively in this hinge moment.

What if we have tried college ministry and failed?

It isn't surprising that Christian colleges, campus-based groups, or church-based groups may consider college ministry a "lost cause" – or at least only worthy of limited investment – because of the difficulties of the past. Denominations and other networks may also shy away from collegiate efforts because of past struggles.

While history should be taken into account, the *reasons* for our failures must be properly assessed. I would encourage any of these groups to consider whether they truly approached college ministry in the missiological ways detailed in this book. These missions

principles are not only prescriptive for greater success but are *descriptive* of what actually seems to work best. A large number of turbulent college ministry histories are likely a result of lacking these missiological practices – allowing time for growth, emphasizing strategy, investing properly, continually progressing, and so on. Realizing that college ministry is best understood as *missions* is a key to changing our results in the future.

Yet past difficulties should also open us to the possibility of using *nontraditional* college ministry models. In fact, it's my suspicion that many of us will find greater success only through partnership, niche ministry, or other forms not abundantly prevalent now. (Several possibilities are discussed in the “Road Map” chapter.)

Hopefully this book will give any person, church, parachurch group, or denomination new hope for reaching collegians – whether they have already seen success, have tried and failed, or have never tried before.

Why should we invest in people who will bear fruit for somebody else?

A common concern about college ministry is that we are preparing people for lives of impact and service... *somewhere else*. While we may sow and sow into col-



(83) This beautiful chapel is a well-known structure of the Falcon tribe at the Air Force Academy. On secular campuses like this, chapels often serve as worship spaces for various Christian denominations and even multiple religions.

(81) This graffiti tunnel painted by the Mountaineers of Appalachian State serves as an excellent metaphor for the creativity, darkness, and wildness that exist in the campus tribes.



(86) Hillel Centers and other Jewish student groups work among over 500 North American campus tribes. This one is located among the Bearcats of Cincinnati.

(84) One part of leading a college ministry is regularly sharing its progress with overseers and supporters. While the need to “justify” the ministry can at times be tedious, this also allows a wide variety of people to recognize and connect with God’s work among the campus tribes. Here, Stacey Wideman, Coordinator for the Collegiate Church Planting Community in the Boston area, shares the group’s activity with members of the Greater Boston Baptist Association.



lege students’ lives, the “harvest” will regularly be gained by others.

The response to this concern has three parts.

First, the assumption that college students will disconnect with our ministry after their time in college is not automatically correct. Students regularly stay for years or even decades in the city in which they attend school, and they’re often able to connect with the ministries that formerly nurtured them. And national groups – denominations or parachurch ministries – can see long-lasting, far-reaching connections with former students, even as those individuals move from place to place.

Second, we should remember the unselfishness with which we view other ministry efforts – including both youth ministry and missions. Ministry to youth is very much concerned with preparing kids to bear fruit in the years to come, though that often takes place beyond their present churches and communities. And our work in missions – whether across the state or across the world – continues with gusto, even when churches and parachurch ministries may see absolutely *no* tangible “return” on that investment. (Is anyone expecting their mission to a tribe in Africa to produce deacons for their own church?) In these areas, our desire to fulfill

God's Kingdom purposes has overruled any need to see *local* fruit from our ministry efforts. The same standard should be applied to college ministry.

But a third response to this concern is a call to recognize that college students *can* in fact dramatically impact us *right now*. Numerous churches, campus-based ministries, Christian colleges, and other organizations already reap great benefits from the students presently involved – particularly if those students are shepherded and trained well. Regularly, college ministries that have impacted students during the early years of college see those same students begin to serve and lead skillfully as they continue to progress through school.

Will college students really respond to us?

There are many reasons we may be intimidated by college students and the environment they inhabit.

First, it's easy to feel our efforts are only wasted by trying to reach students in the middle of what can be a hedonistic and sinful culture. It may even seem dangerous to our own spirits to immerse ourselves in college campuses, where God's name and truth are so often rejected and defamed.

Second, even when students aren't drawn to the "darker" side of college life, they can seem distracted, uncommitted, and engrossed in a campus culture busy with activity. They often appear uninterested in spiritual matters as they instead develop and enjoy other parts of their life. We also may wonder if they will really respond to older people, whether those are college ministry leaders, church pastors, church members, or others. This all makes the prospect of "breaking in" with campus missions daunting indeed.

Third, college students can be intimidating to us because they are *college students*. Such people represent a large percentage of America's smartest individuals. They are presently in the learning process, meaning their minds are active and sharp and questioning. It may seem difficult for a common college ministry, church, or any other group of well-meaning Christians to reach this distinct audience.

Yet I would argue that the intimidating nature of the campus and its students in fact *calls* for using even greater means for missions to these tribes. William Carey rightly noted in *An Enquiry* that "the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection *against* preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument *for* it."

Meanwhile, the busy, distracted nature of students simply argues for greater strategy and better, more effective means. Christians often fail in these environments not because students don't want our service but because we don't realize how to serve them best. We should also recognize that college students, who may live as "practical orphans" in their new campus home, are quite interested in connecting with older adults. This Millennial Generation is particularly apt to desire relationships with those older and wiser than they.

And yes, many of these students are both intelligent and inquisitive. But that, too, should be an *incentive* to reach them, while it also requires us to work hard to strengthen our college ministry abilities. Why would we not seek to introduce Christ and His Kingdom by every possible means and with all possible efforts into these unique college environments? Wouldn't we want the centers of our nation's education – and in many ways the whole world's education – to have unceasing contact with skilled Christian ministry? Don't we want to reach the "brilliant and barbaric" collegiate tribes?

If we're willing, there is great potential for Christendom in the very qualities that now intimidate us.

Is college ministry worth the financial investment,

when college students aren't able to give back financially?

To many readers, this may seem like a fairly crass concern. But this is the most common concern about college ministry I hear.

It is of course not wrong for Christians to consider how to steward the money God has provided. And participating in college ministry does require a willingness to have a "negative balance ministry," because it is rare that an organization's investment will be fully financed by the students themselves during their time in college. However, there are a few answers to this concern.

First, our financial objection to college ministry is rebutted by our own involvement in missions. Our work among the worldwide unchurched doesn't always "support itself" financially – yet that fact doesn't cause us to quit. For numerous Kingdom-minded reasons, Christians give perpetually to international missions efforts – often in far greater amounts than it would take to build solid college ministry in our own local areas.

We should also recognize that college ministries are far more sustainable than we generally realize. Often college ministries do not need the budgeting or staff levels

required by other ministries; even a large and active college ministry may still be far cheaper than work in other areas.

Meanwhile, college students have more disposable income than many other segments of the population. When they are presented with needs they care about, they are willing to give. Believe it or not, in a larger college ministry where students have been trained in the biblical command to give, it is quite possible for student donations to equal the investment required, or at least to provide a strong financial foundation.

Finally, we should remember that college students *grow up*. There will be a day when the students presently in our college ministries do have steady income streams. And just as they often consider donating to their universities and their high schools, these graduates will often gladly consider giving to a college ministry that shepherded them during those years. Many campus-based groups already depend heavily on alumni donations, and this is an area in which church-based college ministries and ministries at Christian colleges could see similar funding help.

Again, I recognize that some will see discussion of these financial issues as crass or mercenary. By provid-

ing practical responses, my hope is simply to help remove all possible roadblocks to participating in missions to our campuses.

our love for missions and youth ministry

As reflected in the thoughts above, *many of our reasons for hesitating in college ministry could also be used against youth ministry or international missions*. Yet Christians have come to see that both of these efforts are absolutely worth our attention, our investment, and our labors.

And even the very reasons we love these ministries can help drive our love for college ministry, too.

Regarding youth ministry, college ministry is our chance to *finish the job*. In ministry to junior high and high school students, we have devoted ourselves to raising up adolescents in the Lord. But it's clear that adolescence does not end with high school graduation. Spiritual formation continues in the post-high school years, as students are both more independent and are thrust into new communities, new situations, and new moments of decision. Without strong college ministries to greet them, we run the risk of wasting the progress gained. But if we teach students to continue to live their faith in this new, independent world of college,

our earlier teaching and discipleship actually gets solidified.

When it comes to our love for international missions, college ministry allows us to practice that same sort of outreach closer to home, with the students and campuses most dear to us. We know the value of traveling throughout the world to reach the neediest people, and we have learned the value of impacting groups who can help us reach even more people. College students – including both American-born and international students – are some of the neediest among us. They are also some of the most strategic for a future of spreading God’s glory in the United States and beyond.

My hope is that as we examine our devotion to youth ministry and missions, we might see that our reasons for loving these areas compel us – even obligate us – to use greater means for college ministry, too.

greater means, better means

We have a duty to use greater means for reaching college students. Of course, “greater means” won’t always lead us to do *more*; in some cases, we may need to combine efforts, remove inefficiencies, or otherwise do “less.” But overall, our greater means will indeed involve *more* – more attention, more prayer, more time,

more leaders, more money, more oversight. Yet it is hard to deny that this is a worthy sacrifice – because it’s also hard to deny that impacting college students could impact the whole world.

But without taking severe measures to improve the field of college ministry, there is no reason to believe that we will even continue to see the effectiveness of college ministry’s past. Yet if we do somehow maintain the status quo, we are still far from realizing the impact we could achieve among these students. Meanwhile, as more and more students progress through college with little or no lasting Christian impact, we face a bleak future in American Christianity.

Yes, there are honest practical concerns about using greater means to reach college students. Our investment in finances, time, energy, and other resources will require sacrifice and risk. But there is a much larger risk if we *don’t* use greater means to impact collegians.

As William Carey sought to call Christians to the task of missions, he delivered a sermon that would later be described as “deathless” because of its continuing impact on the world. Carey’s main points were summarized with a line that is as appropriate for our piece of the worldwide missions task as they were back then:

Reaching the Campus Tribes

“Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

We would be hard pressed to declare that most American Christians, churches, or denominations have truly been expecting or attempting great things in reaching the campus tribes. But if we lift up our eyes to the fields before us, I believe we will find God ready to provide an astounding harvest.

We can see a day in which students are consistently confronted with the claims of Christ during their college years. We can have a future in which Christian young adults regularly emerge from college ready to serve and live and lead in ways we haven’t even imagined. There can be a time – not long from now – when college is no longer the “high point” in the lives of so many but is simply the springboard to the great story God has written for the people of these tribes.

We call these tribes college campuses, and we desperately need to use greater means to reach them.



(88) These sorority sisters gathered outside DePaul University provide one example of the many organizations that draw new college students’ interest. Clearly, involvement in campus activities like this can turn out to be enriching, time-consuming, relationship-building, harmful, discouraging, encouraging, or all of these things.

(89) Within the Blue Devils tribe, carnival-style food booths, live music, and costumes grace the campus during the closing days of the school year. Many tribes celebrate the end of the year with special events, providing relaxation and enjoyment while students prepare for final exams and graduation.

orienting

(a conclusion & vision trip)

written at Jacksonville University, campus #137
June 19

In the last week, I've had the opportunity to visit two campuses – West Virginia University and George Mason University – which happened to be holding New Student Orientation activities during my visits.

For the uninitiated, NSO is a summer event when freshmen make their way to campus, often with parents in tow, in order to (presumably) get “oriented” for the year to come. This event often involves registering for classes, touring the campus, learning traditions and other school “rules,” and perhaps even moving in to the dorms.

Orientation also brings recruitment by countless organizations. Depending on the school, this can include

extracurricular activities (frats, clubs, ministries, etc.), but it very likely also includes community establishments...

...such as banks, with their slick cups and pens and checkbook holders, recruiting students and their (parents') money. You'll also find newspaper subscription-hawkers, cell phone companies, and the ever-present bookstore, who will remind you from the beginning of your college experience that its convenience and support of the school make higher prices worth the cost.

Each business recognizes that this is a fresh crop, a group of pre-freshmen ready to be served! After all, a whole bunch of customers just graduated in May, and while their faces are long forgotten, their patronage is certainly missed.

(The credit card companies are probably absent at this point; they will instead show up within the semester, when parents aren't around, with lots of free T-shirts or other flashy giveaways.)

This is Orientation.

But as missionaries, we look closer.

This is a land of fresh, wide-eyed potential. 18-year-old men and women walk these halls with maps they won't soon need. Over the next four years, they will encounter a sort of life they haven't known, with freedoms to do and be and become. The skin of high school, often so restrictive with its cliques and malformed "cool" and Babel-like, single-language culture, will be shed. New friends, new acceptance, new opportunities are here, whether this place is 50,000 people strong or much smaller.

A college is bigger than its numbers.

The hustle and bustle that will soon be found daily on campus will be a great visual metaphor for the life, the energy, the haphazard but steady progress that happens in this place.

Successes in the next four years will lead to the greatest joys imaginable, with experiences that last a lifetime or even lead these beautiful people to a new sort of life altogether. Reinventing oneself is not an uncommon event on a college campus.

These men and women will "find themselves" in all the best ways: within majors they didn't know existed, within communities they didn't know *could* exist,

within new routines and challenging schedules and the *maturity* that makes life breathe easier. Leaders will rise up, either realizing the potential we always knew they had... or shocking everyone with ability we never knew existed.

Some of these men and women will find husbands and wives over the next four years, and many others will have their "antes upped," as co-ed friendships help raise the bar on what they're looking for in a significant other.

In even the *first month* of school, many of these guys and gals will join clubs that will "stick." Many will start a friendship that will last forever. Many will be invited to a Bible study. Many will find their church – or at least start looking with intentionality. Many will reflect on this new experience after a few weeks, grin, and look forward to an amazing four years.

In those next four years, plenty of these men and women will get a leadership position. Or two. They'll get in shape. Get a kiss (even their first, in some cases). Get engaged. Learn to schedule. Get a 4.o. Get honored. Make 2,000 Facebook friends. Find a career. Study abroad. Let go a little, loosen up a bit, mature a lot, and laugh nearly every day.

Some of these nearly-collegians will be back smiling next year at Orientation, happily representing the glories they've found to a new batch ready to be influenced and trained. Many of those glories would pleasantly surprise them today.

And some of those booths will be ministry booths, because the college ministry communities will have welcomed in Christians and non-Christians for discipleship and fellowship and conversion and love. Lots and lots of love. Boys and girls will come to school uncommitted and will leave vibrant, wide-eyed Jesus followers, and the whole world will be different because of it.

As missionaries, we look.

This Orientation also presents a land of unspeakable danger. 18-year-olds walking these halls at Orientation don't realize the changes about to take place, and there are few good maps. Over the next four years, they will encounter a sort of life they haven't known, with freedoms to fail and waste and destroy. The buffers of high school and family, often places of unappreciated coziness and naiveté and ever-present *help*, will be long gone. New kinds of pain, new temptation, new *harshness* are here, whether this place is 50,000 people strong or much smaller.

A college is bigger than its numbers.

The hustle and bustle that will soon be found daily on campus will conceal much of the death, the hurt, the haphazard and steady decay haunting this place.

Simple "mess-ups" in the next four years will lead to the deepest pain imaginable, in some cases pains that last a lifetime or even lead these beautiful people to take their lives altogether. Collegiate suicide is not an uncommon event.

These boys and girls will "find themselves" in all the worst ways: within temptations they didn't know existed, within relationships they didn't think *could* exist, within new routines and schedules and the *stresses* that can color days gray. Cults will rise up: cults of personality, cults of pleasure, and even real religious cults.

Many will "play house" over the next four years, and even today at Orientation the girls flaunt bodies, and even today the boys muster courage and methods to take them up on it. Many boys and girls will lower their expectations, willing to do much and accept many that they wouldn't have only a year or two before, in hopes of touch and friendship and love and promise.

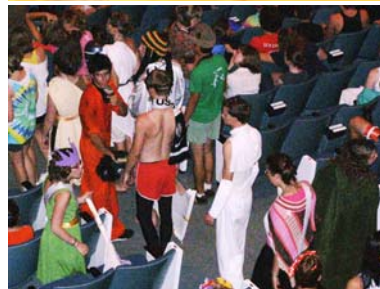
In even the *first month* of school, many will be invited to parties that get them in over their heads. Many will get drunk for the first time. Many won't be invited to a Bible study. Many will attend church for the last time for many years. Many will reflect on this new experience after a few weeks, shudder, and walk forward into four long years.

In those next four years, plenty of these men and women will make a life-changing bad decision. Or three. They'll get in heavy debt. Have a homosexual encounter (even their first, in some cases). Get an eating disorder. Get depressed. Reject their faith. Abort their education. Abort a child. Bring shame to themselves, their family, or their student organization. Masterfully learn "the world," in all its selfishness and evil and temporary gratification. Lose friends. Let go of too much, loosen up too much, mature too little, and cry on many, many days.

Some of these nearly-collegians will be back smiling next year at Orientation, happily representing the "glories" they've found to a new batch ready to be influenced and trained. Many of those glories would repel them today.

This is the brink called Orientation, as men and women

walk the halls of campus with their soon-tossed maps and their soon-absent parents and their fearful hope in tow.



(90) New Student Orientation for the Mountaineers of West Virginia University... (top left)

(91) ...for the Trojans of Trinity International University (top right)

(92) ...for the Thunder tribe of Wheaton College (bottom left)

(93) ...and for the Patriots of George Mason University.

into the harvest

a road map forward from a road trip's findings

In earlier chapters, I included areas in which local college ministry and the entire field should improve, connected under the banner of viewing college ministry as a true missions effort. But by seeing college ministry in action around the U.S., I've also had the opportunity to observe and consider specific steps that American Christians can take to develop this work.

Researching such a large cross-section of college ministry has given me the chance to think *big* thoughts and *broad* thoughts about where the field of college ministry can go from here. Big thoughts are important because we must make great strides to meet this great need. But breadth is also helpful, because strategies and tactics for moving forward should come from an

understanding of the actual nationwide situation – not simply from knowing our own regions or our own networks. By encountering a wide variety of ministries – large and small, flourishing and struggling, well-resourced and lacking resources – I've had the chance to think about what steps forward are both realistic and most helpful for reaching the campus tribes better.

As we more highly value college ministry, many new ideas will come to light – and many new efforts will be made possible. In the meantime, these are the steps I believe could bring the most help right *now* to the field of college ministry. Use the beneficial ideas; throw away the rest. Better yet, improve on these ideas!

Part One: Champions

we need a hero!

Actually, we need lots of heroes. The spread and improvement of college ministry will happen as hundreds of individual Christians help it happen.

We need parents to decide they want more for their children. We need pastors and other church leaders to look beyond their walls to the local campus tribes. We need many to remember the students we send to college each year, our youth group graduates who need us

to finish the job of discipling them.

We need other heroes, too: Denominational leaders who advocate for college ministry and make the decisions needed to support this missionary venture. High school kids who push their leaders to prepare a future college ministry for them. Churches with no youth population who still support campus mission efforts. Present college ministers who champion using greater means within their organizations. Others who brilliantly work out new and better college ministry models. Wise Christians who broker cooperation between college ministry efforts. College administration members, faculty, and staff who allow campus ministries to flourish. Generous Christians who give – perhaps even in field-changing amounts. Others who set up a meeting with a leader in their church or community, simply to get the ball rolling for using greater means to reach college students.

Some heroes may do huge, obvious, field-affecting things. But thousands of heroes have the ability to change *their* local college ministry situations – and therefore to impact local campus tribes forever.

maybe even a super-sized hero

In the 1960s, youth pastors Mike Yaconelli and Wayne

Rice began fighting for churches to better value youth ministry. Their eventual organization, Youth Specialties, helped catapult youth ministry to its position today as one of churches' primary (and best-supported) ministries. Youth Specialties has been a catalyst on two fronts: helping Christians care about youth ministry, and helping youth ministry improve.

It may be that college ministry will be best served in the same way – by a “super-sized hero,” an organization devoted to proclaiming the value of college ministry and helping the field develop.

*Thousands of
heroes have the
ability ... to impact
local campus
tribes forever.*

A similar umbrella organization for international mission work was the solution William Carey offered in his *Enquiry*. He urged the creation of a cooperative missions-sending agency, whether inside his own denomination or otherwise. And ultimately, as we have seen, *plenty* of organizations devoted to missions development and mobilization have been created, to the glory of God and the spread of His fame.

There are several present denominations, networks,

and parachurch organizations which God could call to champion college ministry within the greater Christian community. Likewise, some individual college ministries around the U.S. could rise up as vanguards in this important field, sharing what they've learned beyond their walls, their regions, and even their denominations. A few ministries – like University Presbyterian Church in Seattle and The Mill in Colorado Springs – have already begun to have this sort of far-flung impact.

Or a heroic effort on behalf of college ministry may arise from a new organization altogether, a kind of “Youth Specialties” for collegiate ministry here in the twenty-first century. An independent organization like this could serve as a think tank, a resource producer, a collaborative network, a fundraiser, and a rallying cry for college ministry – across the branches of our field, across denominational lines, and throughout the country.

Cooperation and networking have allowed for better work among foreign tribes, and the same is needed for college ministry. We may need a super-sized hero or even *several* catalytic agencies to proclaim the value of college ministry and help increase its effectiveness.



(94) The “Overlook” building of Prince Avenue Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia, contains a student café and worship space. The church invested in creating the Overlook to provide a central college ministry location within walking distance of the Bulldog tribe. The church itself is located about 10 miles from campus.



(96) Perhaps a church with particularly effective college ministry could champion the cause on a national level, much like Moody Church helped popularize Sunday School many years ago. (left)



(100) Prayer rooms have become a major trend among campus tribes. The rooms are often set up for 24/7 access, and students are encouraged to pray about many local issues and world issues – including those presented in the various requests placed around the room. This room among the Vandal tribe at the University of Idaho was hosted by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

(97) National parachurch ministries can choose to impact college students as part of their overall work. Here, students and their families gather for graduation from the Focus on the Family Institute, a semester-long program exploring worldview, political, and family issues.



heroes on the ground

Of course, many of college ministry's heroes will be men and women called to impact students directly as college ministers. We need to pray for God to send more people into the harvest field of the campus tribes, whichever branch of college ministry they serve in.

And hopefully a number of these ministers will become college ministry "lifers," those women and men who serve for decades in this noble cause. As I saw numerous times throughout my trip, veterans have a wisdom for other college ministers (and for their students) that simply can't be matched. Having an increasing number of seasoned collegiate missionaries will be enormously powerful in helping our field develop.

College ministers also must do their part in helping draw others to this task, by sharing their stories with the greater Church. From early years, even children and teenagers should hear the stories of faithful efforts among the campus tribes. Articles and books should be written about these missionary efforts, and local congregations and even larger audiences should be privy to the captivating testimonies. God may use those stories to call other people to join this noble missions effort – whether they are called to pray, to give, or to go.

we need a Hero

More than we need all these other heroes, we need one Hero to touch the campus tribes and to call people into this effort. While this book focuses on the means we might use to impact the collegians, there is no mistaking: Unless the Lord builds this house, we labor in vain.

William Carey's suggestions for international missions included an urgent call to prayer, and it would be silly not to do the same here. Just as Christians passionately pray for foreign fields that many of us will never see, so we should pray earnestly for these mission fields God has placed immediately before us.

We should pray that God would rend His heavens and come down, that His Kingdom would come, and that His will would be done among the campus tribes. We should pray for purity and wisdom and cooperation among the workers and the Christian students who serve as indigenous leaders among their peers. We should pray for revival on campuses, whether it comes quickly or through God's steady work over time. We should pray for strength to serve and words to speak and love to give. We should pray for Christian adults to rise up and welcome college students, offering both warmth and wisdom. We should pray for protection from error and ineffectiveness and a willingness to sac-

rifice for the collegiate cause. We should pray for unsaved students to meet Christ and for saved students to go deeper. We should pray for professors, administrators, students' families, and their classmates.

The future of American Christianity hinges on the future of American Christians. Many of those – and others who will soon come to Christ – are in college right now. Let us pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers into His harvest field.

Part Two: Strategies

a College Student Plan in each church

One of the simplest and yet most revolutionary changes we need involves every church simply making a specific *plan* for the college students it encounters.

Forming a "College Student Plan" means making a prayed-through, thought-through, purposeful decision about how college students fit within a particular church. Through this process, leaders answer key questions:

- ⊕ When college students are present, how should they connect to the community of our church?
- ⊕ How do our present structures (small groups,

service opportunities, leadership opportunities, etc.) apply in their case?

⊕ How can we really serve college students best?

The Plan that results can take a multitude of forms. But it is shocking that an enormous number of churches appear to have absolutely *no* Plan in place, despite occasional or regular contact with college-age people.

The need to have a College Student Plan does not only apply to churches near large public universities or other major schools. Thousands of churches are close enough to college campuses that local students sometimes darken their door, and churches must plan for those visitors. But the necessity of a College Student Plan extends even further; it applies to *every* church that has a youth ministry! Why? Because any church that had seniors in its youth group last year has college-age people in its family this year.

Perhaps some churches feel they must either have a full college ministry program or nothing at all. But this is simply not the case. In fact, if I began my trip with the faint illusion that every church should build a full-fledged college ministry program, my research quickly cured me of that notion. Not every church needs a standard, holistic college ministry, and obviously not



(115) The Varsity is a classic and famous diner hangout serving the Yellow Jacket tribe and other citizens of Atlanta since 1928.



(99) Park Street Church in Boston has long partnered with Campus Crusade as its primary college ministry conduit. By so doing, the church is able to impact about two dozen area schools. And Real Life (the Campus Crusade "movement" in the Boston area) receives the support of a major area church, a large investment for its ministry budget, and office and housing space.



(102) The Mill is the well-known college and young adult ministry of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. Their weekly Friday meeting is attended by several hundred, and they recently began a second version of The Mill at a church in the Denver area.

(101) Under the leadership of Mark Dever, Capitol Hill Baptist Church has become influential for many churches in the area of local church health. CHBC has also strategically partnered with a campus-based college ministry, InterVarsity, to help its college students receive relevant, effective impact in the D.C. area.



every church will be able to support that level of investment. In fact, our Christian cause among campus tribes would actually be damaged if every local church began competing for the students on the campus.

But every church that encounters college students must plan for that encounter.

the many possibilities for a profitable Plan

Of course, the specifics of this Plan will vary between churches, as differences in context, resources, capabilities, location, and other factors are taken into account. Like any mission, the college ministry should fit both the recipients of the ministry and the “sending organization.” So *It is shocking that an enormous number of churches appear to have absolutely no Plan in place.*

the College Student Plan should be formed through lots of prayer and a deep consideration of both the sponsoring group (in this case, the church) and the students being reached. This may require several weeks or months of exploration.

Some churches will, after much prayer and consideration of their context, create a classic, full-fledged col-

lege ministry that provides students with discipleship, fellowship, and ministry opportunities. While this will require a strong investment and the patience to let the ministry grow, that church could see an effective campus mission impact their community for decades.

In other cases, the College Student Plan will be less complex – but it should still be specific. For instance, some churches may choose to incorporate college students into present structures, perhaps by starting a collegiate small group or class. While this option may not actively seek to reach a college campus, the college students who attend the church will truly be connected.

Other churches may find that their college students are best served in combination with another ministry, like youth ministry, young adult ministry, or the regular adult programs in the church. This can allow for helpful sharing of space and resources, and in smaller churches, this can help achieve a more beneficial group size. However, this option should be undertaken with care. College students should still be encouraged to seek discipleship relevant to their particular circumstances, whether in the church or elsewhere.

Still other churches' best College Student Plan will involve specific partnership with other local churches,



(110) Many major universities have multiple college ministry buildings situated on or very near campus, usually housing different denominational ministries. This Baptist Collegiate Ministries structure, located among the Tiger tribe of Memphis, allows for highly accessible meetings, ministry events, and office space.



(103) Tom Short, preaching here among the Cougars tribe of Columbus State Community College, is one of a handful of widely traveled campus evangelists.

(105) Not all college ministries are found in sprawling, house-sized buildings. Some, like the Lutheran Center's Chapel on the Ave. near the University of Washington, use less traditional environments. Of course, most campus missions have no dedicated facility at all.



campus-based ministries, or a local Christian college. Together, the cooperating ministries could potentially provide holistic discipleship while also having the opportunity for outreach. In my opinion, this is one of the ideas with the most promise for hundreds of churches who lack effective college ministry – or who would simply like to reach college students even better than they presently do. By partnering, ministries share the load; but more importantly, students receive the community and discipleship they need.

Meanwhile, some churches may decide that college students will be best served by being directed to another church altogether. If a church is unwilling or unable to provide students with the ministry they need at this critical time (or to partner with others to do so), it is imperative that their College Student Plan involve pointing students to what they need.

This principle includes a church's "home-grown" college students. If a church can not make room for students who choose to attend a local college (or for those who return home during school breaks), then students should be encouraged to find another church that will meet these needs at this vital time. In fact, this might need to happen while those individuals are still in high school, so they can assimilate into the new congrega-

tion long before high school graduation. It is truly a loving church that recognizes its limitations and helps students find the best discipleship for this hinge moment of their lives.

For many churches, the College Student Plan will also need to take into account drastic seasonal differences, as students leave town for school, come to town to attend a local school, or both. Some churches' main focus will be students who graduated from their youth group; other churches will mostly minister to students who didn't grow up in that church. (Many churches will encounter – and therefore need to arrange for – both of those groups.) Some churches may even be called to focus on a particular type of student or a particular segment of the campus.

Ultimately, hundreds of churches will develop an altogether *unique* College Student Plan for their situation, as God lends His brilliance for this very important mission work. I am excited to watch as new, creative models arise when churches become desperate to reach this generation. There can be as many College Student Plans as there are churches.

But what shouldn't happen anymore is thousands of Christian students finding *no* Plan in place in the home

churches in which they grew up. Nor should students find themselves ignored by the churches they happen to visit during the college years. Each of these churches must do something, with purpose and precision, to make room for the people from the campus tribes.

more strategy in other branches

I would also encourage this same sort of methodical, purposeful plan-making to occur within campus-based ministries and Christian colleges. In many of these college ministries, there is a strong bias toward ready-made programs that have been used elsewhere. While these successful templates might be a helpful place to start the planning process, students will only be best served when campus mission efforts are tailor-made for the tribes they are reaching. Contextualization is key. This doesn't mean new ministries have to be untrue to their sponsoring organizations or fully "start from scratch" at each campus. But *form* should always serve *function*, not the other way around. Oftentimes that will require creative adjustments to the usual template.

Wise contextualization will also reveal that not every campus is right for every national ministry. Some parachurch and denominational organizations seem to assert a "manifest destiny" to place a ministry at every available college campus. However, I would urge all

groups to consider planting ministries only where their work is truly needed. As with international missions, the cause of Christ must trump the cause of a single group.

making room for students elsewhere, too

This same sort of planning could take place at any level of ministry, within any group working for Christ's cause. Denominations, of course, should consider what role college ministry presently plays – and could play – throughout their churches and on campuses. (It is disappointing that many Evangelical denominations have little or no resourcing in this area.)

Other networks of cooperating Christians, from church-planting groups to missions-sending organizations to theological affinity networks, should consider whether they are including college student strategies as fully as they should be. Not all groups will need to create an altogether new collegiate program, but they might have opportunities to partner with or complement other student discipleship.

Further, parachurch ministries not already involved in college ministry could consider instituting special efforts to involve college students. How valuable would biblical financial principles be on a college campus, for

example? Or what inroads might Christian media companies make with a collegiate strategy?

When we recognize that we have the chance to impact people at a true life-crux during the college years, it makes sense to aim to do so. Connecting college students with a denomination, parachurch ministry, resources, and anything else *now* might connect them for a *lifetime*.

there is no best strategy

The collegiate strategies we all put in place will vary widely in appearance, formality, investment, breadth of ministry, and size. There is no universally applicable, step-by-step approach to building a college ministry, whether in a church or on a campus. Every group must discover independently the very best way to impact students in their context, and anyone claiming to have “the” method for college ministry is wrong. (I have, sadly, run into several people who come close to claiming that very thing.)

Further, each college ministry can only do what God allows it to do; the *amount* of ministry is not the key issue for this point. But it is vital that our efforts, however small or large they might be, reflect a missiological understanding and a clear respect for the people we

seek to reach.

taking the strategy-first approach

While we should end up with different models and methods based on our varying contexts, I would argue that most new college ministries should actually *begin* with the same focus. For any group hoping to start a new effort among college students (whether large-scale or with more focused aims), one missionary practice worth heeding is attending to strategy *before* building those ministries.

Oftentimes a collegiate effort – in any of the three branches of college ministry – begins with some sort of leader assigned simply to “grow the ministry.” Yet as I noted earlier, this “just try something” approach often leads to real difficulties establishing truly solid college ministry work. In other cases, ministries begin their work on campus by copying the strategies received from other contexts. This, too, does not hold much promise for helping a campus mission reach its *full* potential.

There is no universally applicable, step-by-step approach to building a college ministry.



(107) Like many California campus tribes, the Tritons of the University of California San Diego enjoy a beautiful and moderate climate, have a high Asian population, draw many surfers, and use the Quarter System schedule. Differences among campus tribes in widely diverse aspects like these allow for unique experiences and call for unique ministry efforts.



(109) A Sunday night “Vespers” service is hosted by the Royals of Bethel University, but it apparently draws college-age individuals from throughout the Twin Cities and beyond. “City-wide” studies sometimes grow organically, as ministry activities held for one group draw individuals from beyond their own organizations.

(106) Sometimes campus tribes choose to change their names for various social reasons. Arkansas State recently changed their identity from the Indians to the Red Wolves.



What if instead we spent the first several months of every new college ministry *developing our strategy*? This is how many missions efforts begin their work among new people groups. Why shouldn’t we take the same approach?

Depending on the situation and the resources available, a special “College Ministry Strategist,” a team of volunteers, a passionate layperson, or the eventual college minister could strategize the new campus mission. They would spend the time needed to get to know the mission field, its students, and the community. They would also get to know the identity and desires of the overseeing organization and their hopes for the mission. The strategist(s) would visit present college ministries, spend lots of time on campus, interview leaders and students, study, collaborate, and pray continually.

If the ministry already had students present, they would be welcomed and ministered to purposefully. But the focus can’t be on recruiting (recruit to what?) or building the ministry (since the blueprint isn’t in place yet). The focus at the front end would be seeking wisdom, even if that led to a brand new model for college ministry in this place – or to a decision not to create a new ministry at all. The question should always be, “What is God’s brilliant plan for *this* ministry in *this*

place at *this* time?” In the end, the “sending organization” and the strategists would arrive at what they believed to be the best possible ministry to students.

A strategy-first approach would have numerous benefits. In the case of a church, the congregation would now fully own this “mission to the campus,” regardless of present or future leadership. For a campus-based ministry or Christian college, the mission would fit the campus better than any preconceived plan or replicated methodology ever could. And in many cases, this might be the only way to ensure there is time to form strategy at all; many college ministers do not have the time or resources needed to build *and* plan a ministry simultaneously. But by first discovering the new ministry’s particular role in the campus tribe, a mission would be blueprinted to impact students for decades to come.

Across the world, regional and local missions strategists examine the best ways to reach foreign tribes. Already, some denominational and parachurch workers fulfill this role within college ministry. Ultimately, local ministries may find volunteers to strategize their missions, or they may even hire experienced ministers as short-term College Ministry Strategists. But however we do it, there is much to be gained by separating the *building* of a college ministry from the initial *planning*

of the mission.

we must fix the transitions

Finally, one more area in great need of better, more strategic planning is the area of Transitions. As I’ve said before, we have great difficulty helping Christian kids transition from high school to college, as well as helping Christian collegians transition to the young adult world following graduation. Fixing the transitions on both sides of the college years should receive an enormous amount of Christian attention and effort.

Regarding the transition from high school, college ministers must work with youth ministers, parents, and others to help end this difficulty. While college ministers do not have the primary responsibility for helping youth transition successfully, this is certainly a job large enough for an “all hands on deck” approach. Further, college ministers do have wisdom about what students face when they arrive on campus – information critical to helping prepare them for that time.

College ministers *should* feel most responsible for helping their students successfully transition to young adult life. Many college students are in a very unique environment during their years in school, so college ministry needs to be rather specialized to be relevant. Yet the

very act of providing this tailored ministry means students can end up ill-prepared for Christian spirituality in the “real world.”

While I would not argue that we should decrease our efforts at college-specific ministry, we must begin viewing “real world” spiritual training as part and parcel of our discipleship of college students. Not only should teaching and small-group discipleship be devoted to this preparation, but we should work to develop resources to aid this transition. Students’ ability to prosper – and to *continue* to grow – in the “young adult” years must become one of the main criteria for evaluating college ministries.

Part Three: Collaboration

let’s get together

As may have been evident throughout this book (or by the fact that I spent a year meeting with hundreds of college ministers), I have a deep belief that college ministry thinkers should connect and *collaborate*. The development of any ministry field depends on its ability to stand on the shoulders of former leaders – while also learning from those presently discovering better methods. Yet as I discussed in Chapter 3, collaboration is sorely lacking in the field of college ministry.

One immediate solution would be the production of printed materials discussing college ministry. It is a bit surprising that college ministry texts are lacking even among those publishers with roots in the world of college ministry. We need books touting specific methods and stances, introductory primers, and even compilations of helpful articles and past works. Perhaps periodicals – even academic journals – would help just as much as books. Even additional blogs or internet “knowledge bases” covering college ministry could help enormously.

Likewise, conferences and other forums designed to allow for heavy collaboration would be helpful. While present college ministry conferences do allow for some of this, many college ministers report either difficulty attending these forums or difficulty finding conferences that provide the help they need.

Of course, individual ministers also need to make far greater efforts to collaborate with each other, both through one-on-one connections and by using the resources mentioned above. We who serve in this pioneering area must understand the great benefits of collaboration, and we must be willing to invest resources *and time* to that end.

connecting the dots, nationwide

Another “next step” for better collaboration is initiating better communication among those ministries that are *already* connected. Oftentimes college ministers connected by denomination, affinity, or other relationship still have little idea of what is happening within their own ranks. Surprisingly, I regularly have to share with ministers about activities within their own circles!

So one of my *top* suggestions for any national network is to facilitate connections between its own college ministries. This sort of networking would have benefits far beyond only sharing wisdom. For instance, a well-designed network would easily pay for any original investment; better communication pathways would lead to greater effectiveness, better attendance at events, greater use of opportunities provided by the national group, increased purchasing of resources, lasting connections with college students themselves, and so on.

Meanwhile, likeminded ministries not presently connected within a denomination or similar network might find value in joining forces for college ministry. Just as the specialized demands in international missions have led to special partnerships, college ministries could find value in that kind of cooperation. College ministry is a pioneering effort, and there is much

to be gained by walking forward together.

collaboration across lines

We should also be willing to forge collaboration across the lines of geography, denomination, branches of college ministry, and other divisions. In my interactions with college ministers, I have had numerous occasions when I realized that what I was learning would be beneficial to other ministers in quite different situations. Both in our similarities and our differences, there is much to be gained by collaborating across our usual lines.

It is disappointing how little is known by college ministers about the practices and principles of those outside of our own circles or regions. I discovered during the trip that *many* highly successful and college ministries remain widely unknown, even if they draw hundreds or thousands of students. I have also commonly encountered college ministry assertions, theories, and stances that do not take into consideration the entire national collegiate ministry scene. Certainly, even after working for eight years in college ministry prior to my trip, several of my own notions had to be “adjusted” once I saw the true national picture. With greater collaboration, the breadth of activity and contexts would be made more familiar to the whole field.

thought, theology, dialogue, debate

From a national standpoint, taking college ministry seriously should also mean approaching it with the same kind of theoretical rigor that we have learned to do with missions. This will involve delving together into the theology, ministry theory, research, and other academic concerns connected to our field. If *any* ministry demands this sort of intelligent discussion, it is work on college and university campuses.

Presently, it is rare to find this sort of academic focus applied to college ministry-related topics, but I hope that is changing. For instance, I have heard clear academic approaches reflected in interviews with chaplains at Christian colleges. Meanwhile, the Fuller Youth Institute and Talbot Seminary's Christian Education Journal have both published college ministry-related studies in recent years. Some seminary professors, too, are bringing this approach to college ministry – and more seminaries are joining this cause. There may be a day soon when seminaries not presenting a college ministry-related emphasis are in the minority.

We also need much more college ministry-related *research*. My own research during the yearlong trip was purposely anecdotal, not statistical. But we lack both kinds of research, which would help us evaluate minis-

try effectiveness, better understand students, better understand the national scene, and learn from each other. Even *historical* research of college ministry organizations, situations, and leaders would inform and encourage today's college ministers. We should also make use of the available secular research that sheds light on college students and the state of religion on campuses. Just as all these types of research have improved international missions efforts, a strong research component will help drive health and growth in college ministry.

If any ministry demands this sort of intelligent discussion, it is work on college and university campuses.

students, church, and the great tension

After examining the national situation, it's clear to me that one of the most important areas in need of this kind of rigorous inquiry is the issue of college

students' local church involvement. There is no greater tension within the field of college ministry than the tension that surrounds this concern. While it is natural for college ministers to have differing opinions on how students should connect to local churches, the present *tension* leads to disunity, unnecessary competition, and duplication of ministry efforts.

I believe the main reason this tension continues is that few college ministers have a clear grasp on the situation itself – regardless of whether they are church-based, campus-based, or serving at Christian colleges. As far as I can tell, many college ministers have not spent much time developing their own beliefs about the biblical rules and principles in this area. And a large number of ministers seem misinformed about the purposes, methods, and theology held by ministers in the other branches of college ministry. (This was clear as I talked to many in all three branches.) Thus in many cases the tension is caused more by these problems than by any actual theological conflict.

So this is one area in which college ministers need rigorous study to better understand God's truth. We need dialogue to understand each other – and even well-reasoned debate. As college ministers work through these issues, this will ground their teaching and shepherding of students in truth rather than experience. And it will better enable ministries to complement and cooperate with each other.

rigor in every area

But the issue of church involvement is simply one example of the need to rigorously contemplate issues of student discipleship, college ministry practice, and the-



(111) The Purple Door serves the Huskies of the University of Washington by housing students in a "learning community." The building, itself a former fraternity house, is nestled among the many fraternity and sorority houses directly across from the school. Other formal and informal discipleship communities can be found at various campuses around the country.

(108) Several denominations and other fellowships do have annual training and collaboration opportunities. Here, college ministers from some Church of Christ ministries meet for the Campus Ministry United workshop at Harding University in July 2008. (top)



(114) Blackhawk Church in Madison has chosen to minister widely to the Badger tribe without having a traditional, full-fledged college ministry. They point students to campus-based ministries like InterVarsity and Campus Crusade while organizing regular, special ministry efforts. These activities include fellowship events at the church, teaching series on campus, a collegiate leadership team, and a Finals study day each semester with free food and shuttles from campus. This Study Day in May 2008 drew around 1100 students.

(112) Organizational fairs present an opportunity and a challenge for Christian ministries on secular campuses. These gatherings may be the best opportunity to recruit new students, but a ministry is often competing for students' attention with hundreds of other organizations, including other college ministries. Here, InterVarsity presents itself to the Flames of the University of Illinois at Chicago.



ology. Whether a pressing issue is thorny or just trendy, serious study and collaboration are needed. Of course, on some issues, mature Christians will arrive at different conclusions. But *everyone* will grow stronger in ministry as well-reasoned arguments on many topics are presented, debated, adjusted, and improved. And college students will ultimately benefit.

When those uniquely suited to this kind of examination lend their gifts to the field of college ministry (or rise up from within the ranks), this area will see the same sort of advances that missions has seen from the same pursuit. Thoughtful discussion can ultimately produce great *practical* value by solving actual problems and bringing us ever closer to the ideals God has for our mission work.

Part Four: New Models

there are many different ways to do this

As suggested throughout this book, a greater creativity and flexibility is needed in college ministry. Ultimately, a multitude of new models may be necessary to see increased effectiveness – in church-based settings, campus-based settings, and even at Christian colleges. And some of those models may blur the lines between college ministry's branches altogether!

I have had the immense privilege to see some models and ideas for college ministry that already depart from the norms. These include:

- ⊕ Campus-based and church-based ministries tightly partnering
- ⊕ Local networks helping multiple college ministries complement each other
- ⊕ Niche-based college ministries focused on reaching a particular segment of the campus population (future educators, international students, athletes, fraternities, etc.)
- ⊕ Complementary ministries focused on particular areas of student discipleship (i.e., leadership training, missions mobilization, prayer rooms, study libraries, or one-on-one discipleship)
- ⊕ Coalition for Christian Outreach, a national college ministry that empowers ministers to target a different niche in every city they reach – and always partners with another local ministry
- ⊕ “Metro” ministries that focus on a geographical region and multiple campuses rather than a single campus
- ⊕ Adjustment of traditional church forms (Sunday school classes, worship services, etc.) to better correspond with students’ needs and schedules
- ⊕ Collegiate churches organized primarily to reach

college students

- ⊕ Campus Outreach, a national campus-based ministry that “franchises” its ministries into the oversight of local churches
- ⊕ Christian housing ministries located near (or on) college campuses

Just because a model is non-traditional doesn’t mean it is effective or healthy, but I do appreciate that some leaders have tried structures they felt fit their situation better than standard forms. We will need enormous creativity in creating new models to best reach college students. Just as with international mission work, there are major variations in the ways each tribe will best be reached. (In fact, we may even find that some of the ministry models used overseas have helpful parallels among campus tribes, too.)

We will also need brand new models to reach a changing student climate. Not only do worldview shifts affect our work, but even shifts in higher education may require changes. For example, as colleges are developing new ways to deliver education to students online, we may need to adjust our own efforts. Attendance at community colleges appears to be a growing trend; new models and methods should take that trend into account. Other changes will likewise require our flexibil-

ity and creativity.

partnership

Readers might notice that some of the models listed above suggest some sort of *partnership*. There are superb opportunities for various Christian groups to choose to partner together to reach campuses, rather than striving only to create a larger number of individual ministries. For multiple reasons, a smaller number of partnered ministry efforts may fare better and impact more effectively than a greater number of standard college ministries.

This sort of partnership seems to have been the origin of many denominational ministries we see today; groups of churches joined forces to reach students, and to reach them better than they could as individual congregations. Some seem to have lost that mentality, and that is hurting our efforts to reach campus tribes.

Among church-based ministries, I realize that some of the biggest fans of local church autonomy might squirm at talk of “partnership” with other churches or

There are major variations in the ways each tribe will best be reached.

with campus-based ministries. Meanwhile, campus-based groups with strong ministry identities and persistent methodologies might balk at joining forces with churches or other campus groups. And Christian colleges might not immediately recognize any value in letting “outsiders” help impact their students.

But it is important for us to remember that *this model parallels what we often do in missions*. Even the most diehard proponents of independent ministry often join forces at the international level, knowing that mission work often happens better with cooperation. In *that* missions arena, partnership aids specialization, training, financing, growth, and administration. Why not in collegiate missions?

As with any model, this kind of partnership is not the best plan for all college ministry endeavors. The ultimate concern of any college ministry is determining God’s best plan to reach *this* context at this time. But partnership, like every other model, should be seen as an option whenever possible.

smaller pockets for deeper impact

Through partnership, individual groups have a chance to get “bigger” together. But through niche ministry, groups have a chance to target *smaller* pockets of stu-

dents – with the hope of better impact among these student segments.

As noted in the list earlier, some ministries have begun targeting campus niches. Many of these niche ministries take this approach from the start, when an individual or group is called to a segment of students. But niche ministry can also come about within more classic college ministry structures, as those ministries gain inroads with particular groups of students. So even though an established college ministry might not abandon its broader work on campus, they can still take advantage of any niche possibilities God might reveal.

Just as partnership holds much potential, niche ministry could be another one of the greatest “growth markets” for college ministry. I would love to see what would happen if numerous churches, campus-based ministries, and even individuals “adopted” segments of campuses they felt called to reach. Reaching campuses more broadly *and* more deeply may mean reaching students more *specifically*.

Of course this practice, too, is paralleled within foreign mission work, as missionaries sometimes seek to reach segments of populations or to reach cultures through very specific avenues.

avoiding wheel-reinvention

A college ministry model similar to niche ministry is complementary ministry, in which ministries try to complement other student impact taking place.

Duplication of ministry efforts seems to be rather commonplace at many college campuses. In fact, Christian students often work their way from ministry to ministry within a given week, receiving the same sort of discipleship from multiple ministries! So while college ministry *activity* increases, there will often be no net increase in either the total number of students reached or the depth of impact.

But during my yearlong trek, I began noticing a phrase used by several of the ministers I interviewed; they often expressed a hope of “not reinventing the wheel” as they ministered to students. In other words, they desired to supplement and complement what others were doing, instead of simply duplicating ministry efforts. This was exciting to hear.

Some college ministry efforts will best help reach campuses by approaching those mission fields with an eye toward *complementing*. In fact, a fully complementary college ministry may focus on only one area of students’ discipleship, allowing for specialized impact in

an important area. Other ministries may not limit their work to this extent, but complementing may still be a key component of their structures and activities.

For example, complementing has been the aim of the Navigators, one of the best-known but least-visible national college ministries. Local Navigators campus ministries often remain unseen to the casual observer, because their focus, one-on-one discipling, is neither crowd-drawing nor event-driven. But for decades, Navigators members have disciplined students and trained students to disciple others, a practice that is one of the most effective means of impacting collegians. But this discipleship often *complements* the spiritual impact those same students receive from other college ministries on campus.

Likewise, some large, city-wide Bible studies seem to have worked well because they *complemented* students' impact from other ministries. By concentrating only on what they could do best – perhaps providing a strong worship experience and solid, foundational teaching – these studies freed other ministries to connect students to deeper discipleship, service opportunities, and leadership. In the same way, efforts to organize service projects, to help students join international missions efforts, to emphasize prayer campus-wide, to bring major

speakers to campus, or to perform other college ministry activities may sometimes be accomplished best by single-focus, complementary college ministries.

This doesn't mean there won't be room for traditional, large-scale college ministries. It simply means that any ministry should consider the entire Christian mission taking place on the campus already. As we get to know our context, we may find that working in concert with others will be best.

so there you have it

So there you have it: the first inquiry following my exploration of the campus tribes. There will be much more to come, and there are ways you can be involved in helping us all reach the campus tribes better. (Be sure to check out the back pages for some of that info.)

I hope that this book has provided an impetus to value college ministry more and to think about it in new ways. And I hope this chapter's "road map" has provided ideas that either call us to action or lead to even better ideas. It would be phenomenal not only for some of these ideas to be used to better reach campuses, but also for people to take many of these ideas and improve on them!

Reaching the Campus Tribes

But my biggest encouragement is simple: *Let's quit sitting still!* Whether through heroes, plans, collaboration, or new models, American Christians must work hard to develop the field of college ministry. We should indeed expect great things from the God who loves these college students even more than we do. And we should attempt great things for the God who has placed these mission fields before us.

The campus tribes are waiting.



The Back Pages

About the author. Benson Hines started serving college students in 1999, while attending Texas A&M University, and he has been involved in college ministry ever since. Following the research trip (August 2007 to August 2008), he continues to research college ministry, meets regularly with college ministry leaders, speaks to college ministers and college students, and blogs daily about college ministry at www.exploringcollegeministry.com. Ben received his M.A. in Theology from seminary.

The book site. Updates, new versions, corrections, and other goodies are located at the book site: www.reachingthecampustribes.com.

Acknowledgments. This trip could not have been accomplished without the hundreds of amazing people who gave their time, hospitality, finances, and wisdom during the trip. A special thanks also goes to the several “editors” who gave great suggestions and helped this book become much better. And I praise the God who gave me an amazing adventure and the opportunity to see my heroes in action as they labor among the beautiful campus tribes.

Provision. I took the yearlong research trip believing God was calling me to it, and that call has been confirmed as I’ve seen the impact this kind of exploration has for college ministers and for college ministry as a field. But I’m still watching to see how God wants to provide the money the trip required. Finances will also help me continue to serve college ministers in other ways. If this book or my research is helpful to you, donations are always appreciated! Or, if you know someone who might like to invest in the future of college ministry in this way, please consider passing on this need. (All my contact information can be [found here](#).)

Why an ebook? Why did I put this in a free ebook rather than talking to publishers about a standard book? Three considerations were key: availability, time, and creativity. I wanted this book to be as widely available as possible, so if cost might be a barrier to it spreading among Christians... then free is better! Also, I wanted to pass along these findings as soon as possible, and a self-published format allowed for that. Finally, I loved the opportunity to present pictures and other contents that might not make it into a traditional, “formal” book.

I do hope to publish (in standard book form) other findings and adventures. If you’d like to help that happen, one of the best things you can do is share this ebook with others! As more people value college ministry and want to learn about it (especially

those outside of college ministry – like pastors and other Christian leaders), we'll *all* have more chances to share our ideas.

Joining the cause. The best way to receive updates is to join the “Exploring College Ministry with Benson” Facebook Group. If you need to receive updates via email instead, [let me know](#) and I'll add you to the list! Either way, I won't spam you... you'll get *occasional* updates as this project continues, as I take more trips, and when there are ways you might be able to join in! We're all in this together, and we really can change the world as we help college ministry become better valued and better practiced.

Specific help. Let me know if there's any way I can help as you think about college ministry in your context. I'm always glad to answer questions or point people to resources. Be sure to check out my daily blog about college ministry, too, at [exploringcollegeministry.com](#). Certainly, I'm also open to paid opportunities; if you'd like to ask about speaking, consulting, ministry work, or other jobs, all my contact information can be [found here](#).

The lurking X. At nearly every campus, I took a picture of a red “X” (as in, “X marks the spot.”) A few of those pictures ended up in this book, and the particularly observant might find them! Through the year, the X also got filled with stickers from the various campuses, so be sure to check it out sometime. It's pretty neat.

The facts. Clearly, college ministries and campuses themselves can change rapidly. All facts in this book are included as reported to me during the trip (between August 2007 and August 2008). Please let me know about any inaccuracies. All photos were taken by Benson Hines on the yearlong trip. A complete itinerary of the trip's activities can be found at [www.exploringcollegeministry.com/itinerary](#).

The cover and final page tribal photos. The cover pictures are from the following tribes, beginning with the top left: Row 1—University of Wyoming, Stanford University, Judson University, University of Oregon; Row 2—Saint Louis University, Furman University (larger middle picture), Houston Baptist University; Row 3—Vanderbilt University, University of California Berkeley; Row 4—University of Kentucky, Connecticut College, Multnomah University, University of California Santa Cruz.

The pictures on the final page, beginning at top left: Row 1—University of Illinois, Oral Robert University, New Mexico State University, University of Colorado; Row 2—Reed College, Colorado School of Mines, Indiana University, Pepperdine University; Row 3—University of Nebraska, University of Louisville, Minnesota State University Moorhead, California Baptist University; Row 4—George Washington University, Furman University, University of Arizona, Baylor University.