

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REACHING BLACK STUDENTS IN A MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXT

*Why is reaching Black students in a multi-ethnic (ME) context crucial?
How would the kingdom be advanced?*

EXPANDING OUR OVERALL OUTREACH

On the overwhelming majority of campuses, the multi-ethnic chapter is the only InterVarsity Chapter on campus. Therefore equipping these fellowships to engage the Black community is essential to InterVarsity's overall ability to reach Black students.

CAMPUS WITNESS

We are Christ's ambassadors with a message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5). Our ability to be reconciled to each other is crucial to effectively communicating the message of reconciliation with God. Though reconciliation can occur in many forms, the ability to live in weekly fellowship together across ethnic lines can be a powerful testimony to the gospel.

STUDENT DISCIPLESHIP

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). As students in our fellowships interact with Christians from different backgrounds and faith experiences, everyone's faith will be matured. Through this "sharpening" process, God will expose "cultural blind spots" and expand students' understanding of following Christ.

ADVANCEMENT OF THE BROADER CHURCH

Our students will become future leaders in a world where diversity will be an ever-increasing reality. Raising up Christian leaders with skills in developing diverse Christian communities will be critical for the long-term effectiveness of the church in the world.

CATALYST FOR MULTI-ETHNIC MINISTRY

At many colleges and universities, the divide between Black and White is the greatest racial challenge on campus. As students develop tools to cross this divide, those skills will be valuable in establishing relationships across other ethnic lines.

MINISTRY DIAGNOSTIC: KEY OBSTACLES

There are a number of obstacles to Black student ministry in a multi-ethnic context. What are some of the key obstacles for your fellowship? Which are ones that you have potential influence over, and that you can prayerfully work towards changing?

Take some time with your staff or leadership team to discuss the obstacles listed below. Check the 3 issues you believe are the largest obstacles to reaching Black students in your fellowship. (Obviously to do this well, you will need to have had previous interactions and discussions with Black students on campus—for some that might be your first next step.)

SKILL DEFICITS

The styles and modes of ministry often differ significantly across racial lines. The tools that many staff and students have developed for ministry (e.g. sermons/talks, worship, prayer, leadership style, etc.) may be less effective with many Black students.

LOW MOTIVATION

Many students come from Church contexts where cross-racial ministry and fellowship is not a high value. Issues of racial reconciliation and multi-ethnicity may not be perceived as relevant to the gospel, and therefore not a priority for the students.

FELLOWSHIP & COMMUNITY

For many of our fellowships, one of the most compelling aspects for students is community. Unfortunately, as fallen human being we have difficulty “loving our neighbors as ourselves” and loving across differences. Frequently Black students do not have as positive a community experience in the fellowship as those in the majority. Further, the fellowship’s relationship-building activities often conflict with relationship-building activities happening within the Black community on campus. Black students often feel that they have to choose between the two communities

ASSIMILATION CONCERNS

Many Black students perceive (correctly or incorrectly) that involvement in the multi-ethnic fellowship requires the adoption of majority culture. Assimilation dynamics are often a stumbling block to effectively reaching the Black community. Further, given the historical context of Black/White relations, there are negative associations for being a part of a “White organization.” There is often an associated sense that they lack agency or power in the organization.

KEY OBSTACLES CNT'D

RELEVANCE FACTOR

Though there are similarities between the issues that students deal with, some of the primary struggles, needs, temptations, and sins that students face differ across racial and cultural lines. The topics and discipleship areas that the multi-ethnic fellowship emphasizes may not address some of the key discipleship needs for many Black students.

LEADERSHIP FATIGUE

Many Multi-ethnic fellowships have a challenging time creating positive leadership experiences for Black students. The fellowship may have low retention rates for Black leaders, with Black students choosing not to continue after their first year of leadership. Also, if there are only a couple Black students in leadership, there is often a need for them to “represent” the Black community. This experience is fatiguing, and exacerbates the leadership retention issues. Finally, since models of leadership and ministry differ across racial lines, the leadership gifts and styles that many Black students bring may be undervalued or rejected by the Staff or students.

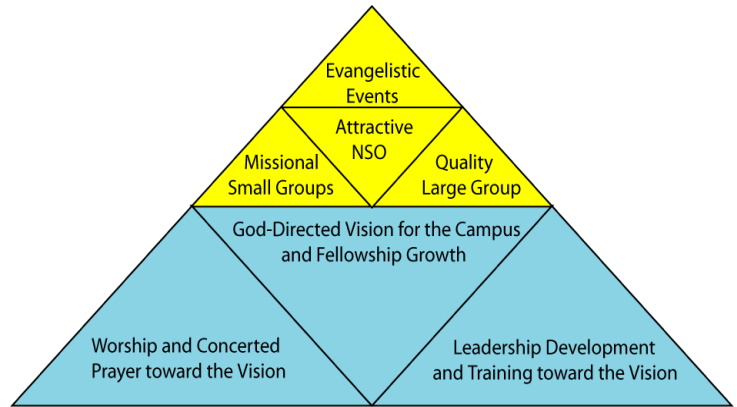
OTHER: _____

MINISTRY DIAGNOSTIC: FELLOWSHIP ASSESSMENT

What are the core weaknesses for your fellowship in outreach to Black students?

The principles for effective outreach to Black students can be assessed in the context of the overall chapter building framework. Greater effectiveness will involve integrating this value into your overall chapter building efforts.

In which areas is the integration of this value strongest, and in which is it weakest? Where might be the most strategic areas to focus?



Take some time with your staff or leadership team to review the categories below, check the 2 areas you believe are strongest, and 2 that are weakest. Remember that the blue bottom 3 triangles are the “behind the scenes work” that lay the foundation for the rest of the pyramid. You may make short-term gains without those 3, but they will be critical for longer-term and larger scale advances.

VISION

Does your fellowship’s vision meaningfully involve outreach to ethnic minority students? Does the student leadership understand why effectiveness in this area is critical to attaining the fellowship’s goals?

PRAYER

Is this an issue that your fellowship prays about explicitly? To what extent is this issue a concern in the fellowship overall?

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Are there leaders in your fellowship who are being equipped for effective outreach to Black students? Are they aware of the obstacles that need to be overcome?

FELLOWSHIP ASSESSMENT CNT'D

QUALITY LARGE GROUPS

Are your large groups conducive to reaching to the Black community? Are these students taken into account as the speakers, format, atmosphere and objectives for your large groups are decided upon?

MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS

Is there a ministry or small group(s) in your fellowship that sees effective outreach to Black students as a critical component of their mission?

NEW STUDENT OUTREACH

Is your New Student Outreach attractive to Black students? Are there intentional efforts made to do things that would draw Black students? Does the majority of the Black community know that you are out there?

EVANGELISTIC EVENTS

Do your evangelistic events engage issues of interest to the Black community? Is the Black community aware of your evangelistic events?

NEXT STEPS I: LOCATING PEOPLE RESOURCES

As you begin to diagnose your situation, you probably will need to find people who can assist you. These might be people who can advise or counsel you—even if they cannot do it regularly, they might be willing to sit down with you once or twice to provide insight and suggestions. There might also be people who can speak at Large Groups or retreats, train staff or student leaders, invest in your Black students, etc.

Look at the ministry obstacles and challenges that you listed, along with the priority needs you determined in your fellowship assessment. Who might be good resource people? Here are some questions that may help you find them; go through each of these questions with your Staff or leadership team. You may need to find other students or local community members to help you answer some of these questions.

1—Are there any predominately Black churches that students on your campus attend? Are there people in these churches that could be potential resource people? Ask students who attend.

2—Are there any Black Christian faculty or staff on your campus?

3—Are there Staff in your region (Black and Non-Black) who have had some success in reaching Black students? “Who can help you identify staff outside of your region that would be willing to provide guidance?”

4—Are there people on your campus who may not be Christian, but have some training/knowledge regarding issues of diversity? Take an opportunity to connect with them and see what applicable insights they have.

5—Are there people organizing events that you could take your students to which could help them grow in ministry to Black students?

6—Have you asked other staff in the area/region about resources they could suggest? Are there local community members or students who can help you with these questions?

NEXT STEPS II: STRATEGIC TIPS

As you discern strategies to move forward in this area, your best resources will probably be people resources and material resources. Additionally, we have included some strategic tips that have been effective in different InterVarsity fellowships. Many of these tips are relevant to students in general and not solely to Black students. Go through this list with your staff or leadership team, and determine some strategic next steps that you can take.

CAST YOUR VISION WITH A BIBLICAL BASIS

Some of your students may associate your efforts with political correctness, or perceive them as being driven by societal pressure rather than the Gospel. Seek out resources to equip you to articulate the Biblical basis for multi-ethnic ministry.

CAST YOUR VISION WITH A POSITIVE BASIS

Beware of setting a tone for discussions of race that are negatively driven, where engaging race is seen as a painful duty. The terminology of “racial reconciliation” by itself is not sufficiently motivating—rather it’s the difficult means to a positive end. Be able to articulate a compelling positive vision of Multi-ethnicity—how would the kingdom of God be advanced if we were able to accomplish this? Positive vision and positive experiences will help enable students to push through the necessary difficult times. **Most of the strategies given below depend on having established a biblical and positive vision for doing so.**

ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY

A key aspect of our outreach is through interpersonal relationships. Assess whether students are actually in relationships with Black students on campus. Encourage students to involve themselves in contexts where there can develop and deepen these relationships (e.g. Gospel Choirs, certain service organizations, dorms and living arrangements, etc.)

ESTABLISH RELEVANCE TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Is your fellowship relevant to the Black community? As students develop cross-racial friendships, and as Black students become more involved in the fellowship, you can gain a clearer sense of the issues that the Black community on your campus is concerned about. Take opportunities to engage in and cooperate with the campus and world issues that they are invested in.

CREATE ETHNIC-SPECIFIC GATHERINGS WITHIN YOUR MINISTRY

It is often helpful to establish ethnic-specific contexts within your ministry (that meet on either a weekly or an occasional basis). These contexts create opportunities for minority students to lead in non-majority contexts. This allows some Black students to exercise their gifts more effectively, and can create a more positive experience in your fellowship for both Black student leaders and members. This also involves creating a fellowship culture that affirms such gatherings rather than denigrating them.

STRATEGIC TIPS CNT'D

INCORPORATE TRADITIONALLY BLACK MINISTRY STYLES INTO YOUR FELLOWSHIP

Encourage your worship team to expand their repertoire of songs, and their understanding of the proper instrumentation and vocalization of them. Create spaces of “open testimony times”. Invite speakers from Black denominational backgrounds. Examine the various aspects of your ministry, and explore ways to diversify the models of leadership and faith expression.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

People learn better if they have tangible experiences to complement what they are learning. Create opportunities for people to enter into majority Black settings (Bring your leadership team to a Black church, do an urban project, etc.)

HOLD YOUR STRUCTURES LOOSELY

Reshaping your fellowship to make it more accessible and effective with Black students often adds a layer of complexity. Be willing to be flexible with your ministry structures where appropriate. For example, allow for the possibility that not all leaders are making the same commitments, leading the same scriptures, participating in the same training, etc.

SEARCH FOR “WIN-WIN’S”

Don’t try to bring everyone together just for the sake of doing so. For example, if you do not have the resources and skills sets for diverse worship and teaching at Large Group, maybe that is not the best place to try to bring people together cross-racially. What type of gatherings/events can you organize that would be win-win’s, where both the majority and minority students will feel blessed? Alternatives might be prayer meetings, outreach/evangelism teams, Spring Break service projects, food nights, well-executed fellowship retreats, etc.

INVITE LOCALLY RESPECTED LEADERSHIP

Inviting a Black speaker to a Large Group or retreat for the sake of reaching Black students may have limited effect. If the Black students on campus don’t know him/her, they probably won’t show up. Invite people who are known and respected by the Black community, e.g. key local pastors, professors, Black Christian students on campus with preaching gifts, etc.

REVERSE INTEGRATION

When trying to bring together majority and minority students, it will typically be challenging to try to bring the minority student into the majority students’ general meeting—you generally have far less trust and influence with them. Instead try gathering a critical mass of the majority student to come into the minority students’ meeting.

NEXT STEPS III: SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

It is critical in our leadership in multi-ethnicity that we are able to cast a vision for it from a Biblical basis. Here are some passages that Staff have used to help their students gain ownership and insight for multi-ethnic ministry. We've also included a brief listing of some of the main points derived from each passage.

MATTHEW 28:16-20, ACTS 1:6-8—THE GREAT COMMISSION

We are called to make disciples of all nations, and to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This great commission is what inspires us toward crossing ethnic and cultural lines.

MARK 11:15-18—CLEARING OF THE TEMPLE

God desires His temple to be a "house of prayer for all nations." However, the temple is set up with a separate Gentile court, and it is structured in such a way that inhibits the Gentiles' participation (money changers, dove sellers, etc.) This passage can provide a context to discuss God's positive vision, and barriers in the structure of the fellowship that inhibit minority ethnicities from full participation and worship.

ACTS 6:1-7—GRECIAN AND HEBRAIC JEWS

This is a bi-cultural church trying to resolve injustice issues within it. The church took radical steps to address the concerns of the minority (Grecian Jews)—all seven "deacons" assigned to the issue were Greek. Note also that as they resolved their intercultural issues the gospel spread.

ACTS 8:26-40, ACTS 10—PHILIP & THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, PETER & CORNELIUS

Both passages are examples of God calling the church to cross ethnic lines for the sake of the gospel. Some similarities between the two: Phillip and Peter were both praying when God spoke to them, the Holy Spirit is involved, they take risks and put themselves in uncomfortable situations, and they respond to what God is already doing.

1 CORINTHIANS 12—ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

God has brought into his kingdom a diversity of people (Jew-Gentile, Slave-Free, etc.) with a diversity of gifts. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I do not need you." We need the diverse people of God to be working in partnership and unity in order to function effectively as the body of Christ and accomplish his purposes.

GAL 2:6-10, GAL 3:26-28—UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Galatians affirms that the gospel transcends human distinctions; "We are neither Greek nor Jew..." It also affirms the calling Peter and Paul have (Gal 2) to focused ministry to Jews and Greeks, respectively. These passages can be helpful for highlighting the need for ethnic-specific ministries as components of a fellowship with a multi-ethnic vision.

NEXT STEPS IV: MATERIAL RESOURCES

Often there are material resources (books, bible study guides, training exercises, etc.) that can be helpful. As you are determining the “next steps” in advancing your ministry, here are a few material resources to keep in mind:

PUBLISHED READING MATERIALS:

Anderson, David A, “Gracism—The Art of Inclusion.” IVP-Based Summary: Pastor David Anderson responds to prejudice and injustice with the principle of gracism: radical inclusion for the marginalized and excluded. Building on the apostle Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 12 to honor the weaker member, Anderson presents a biblical model for showing special grace to others on the basis of ethnicity, class or other social distinction. He offers seven sayings of the gracist with practical examples for building bridges and including others. A Christian alternative to secular models of affirmative action or colorblindness, gracism is an opportunity to extend God's grace to people of all backgrounds.

Ellis, Carl, “Free At Last.” This book is an abbreviated history of the work of Christ and Church through the African-American community. It traces the growth of Black consciousness from the days of slavery to the present, noting especially the contributions of King and Malcolm X. And it provides some contextual tools in understanding the divides between Black and White in the church.

Emerson, Michael O, and Smith, Christian, “Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.” Amazon-Based Summary: Emerson and Smith, who conducted 2,000 telephone surveys and 200 face-to-face interviews in preparing this book, argue that evangelicals have a theological world view that makes it difficult for them to perceive systematic injustices in society. Therefore, many well-meaning strategies for healing racial divisions (such as cross-cultural friendships) carry within them the seeds of their own defeat. Divided by Faith also includes a brilliant, concise history of evangelical thought about race from colonial times to the civil rights movement. Clearly written and impeccably researched, this book ranks among the most compassionate and critical studies of contemporary evangelicalism.

Emerson, Micheal O, et. al., “United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As an Answer to the Problem of Race.” Amazon-Based Summary: Drawing on questionnaires, interviews with church members and leaders, and on-site studies of four racially mixed congregations, the authors probe both the promise and pitfalls of church integration.

Hays, J. Daniel, “From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race.” IVP-Based Summary: The theme of race runs throughout Scripture, constantly pointing to the global and multiethnic dimensions inherent in the overarching plan of God. In response to the neglect of this theme in much evangelical biblical scholarship, J. Daniel Hays offers a thorough exegetical study. As well as focusing on texts which have a general bearing on race, Hays demonstrates that black Africans from Cush (Ethiopia) play an important role in both Old and New Testament history.

MATERIAL RESOURCES CNT'D

Lane, Patty. “A Beginners Guide To Crossing Cultures.” IVP-Based Summary: How do you befriend an international student or a new coworker from a different country? What can you expect when your church building is shared with a congregation from another cultural group? Why are your words and actions sometimes misinterpreted by others? This book helps readers to develop hands-on relational skills that build cross-cultural friendships, and provides practical resources to help you navigate multicultural environments with sensitivity and savvy.

Rice, Chris and Perkins, Spencer, “More Than Equals: Racial Healing for the Sake of the Gospel.” IVP Based Summary: When Spencer Perkins was sixteen years old, he visited his bloodied and swollen father (pastor John Perkins) in jail, a black activist beaten by police. Chris Rice grew up in very different circumstances, as a White American attending an elite Eastern college and looking forward to a career in law and government. Spencer and Chris became not only friends, but yokefellows--partners for more than a decade in the difficult ministry of racial reconciliation. From their own hard-won experience, they show that there is hope for our frightening race problem, that whites and African-Americans can live together in peace.

Salter-McNeil, Brenda and Richardson, Rick, “The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change.” IVP-Based Summary: Racial and ethnic hostility is one of the most pervasive problems the church faces. It hinders our effectiveness as one body of believers. It damages our ability to witness to and serve seekers. Why won't this problem just go away? Because it is a spiritual battle. What should our response be in a world torn apart by prejudice, hatred and fear? We must employ spiritual weapons--prayer, repentance, forgiveness. In this book Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson reveal a new model of racial reconciliation, social justice and spiritual healing that creates both individual and community transformation.

Usry, Glenn and Keener, Craig, “Black Man’s Religion: Can Christianity Be Afrocentric?” IVP-Based Summary: Some say Christianity is white man's religion, and it is true that there is a long and ugly history of abuse of African-Americans at the hands of Anglo Christians. But Craig Keener and Glen Usry contend that Christianity can be Afrocentric. Black Man's Religion is one of the first of its kind, a pro-Christian reading of religion and history from a black perspective. Fascinating and compelling, it is must reading for all concerned for African-American culture and issues of faith.

Usry, Glenn and Keener, Craig, “Defending Black Faith: Answers to Tough Questions about African-American Christianity.” IVP-Based Summary: This book addresses nitty-gritty questions put to the black church by non-Christians. For example, What Do You Say When Someone Claims That Christianity Is a White Religion? What Do You Say When a Muslim Says Christians Were Proslavery? What Do You Say When Others Complain That Christians Did Not Oppose the Slave Trade? What about criticisms of Christianity made by the Nation of Islam? Keener and Usry meet these and other important questions head-on, providing responses relevant to and especially for black men and women.

Woodley, Randy, “Living In Color: Embracing God’s Passion for Ethnic Diversity.” IVP-Based Summary: Randy Woodley, a Keetowah Cherokee, casts a biblical, multiethnic vision for people of every nation, tribe and tongue. He carefully unpacks how Christians should think about racial

MATERIAL RESOURCES CNT'D

and cultural identity, demonstrating that ethnically diverse communities have always been God's intent for his people. Woodley gives practical insights for how we can relate to one another with sensitivity, contextualize the gospel, combat the subtleties of racism, and honor one another's unique contributions to church and society. Along the way, he reckons with difficult challenges from our racially painful history and offers hope for healing and restoration.

Yancey, George, "Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility." IVP-Based Summary: The first part of the book analyzes four secular models regarding race used by Christians and shows how each has its own advantages and limitations. Part two offers a new "mutual responsibility" model, which acknowledges that both majority and minority cultures have their own challenges, tendencies, and sins to repent of, and that people of different races approach racial reconciliation and justice in differing but complementary ways.

Yancey, George, "One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multi-Ethnic Churches." IVP-Based Summary: Sociologist George Yancey's groundbreaking research on multiracial churches offers key principles for those who want to minister to people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds. Insights from real-life congregations provide concrete examples of how ministries can welcome those who have been marginalized. Based on data from a landmark Lilly Endowment study of multiracial churches across America, this volume offers insights and implications for church leadership, worship styles, conflict resolution and much more.

MATERIAL RESOURCES CNT'D

OTHER MINISTRY RESOURCES:

“A Multiethnic Ministry Framework,” IV Staff Paul Sorrentino. This is a reflection on factors that have been helpful and not helpful in developing a multiethnic fellowship at Amherst College. (Located on InterVarsity MX)

BCM New England Training Resources--Some Tools developed by BCM Staff Dr. Alice Brown Collins. Example content includes: A Campus analysis tool, Understanding Core issue for Black Students, Case Studies. Contact: Dakota Pippins (dakota_pippins@ivstaff.org.)

Biblical Foundations of Multi-Ethnic Ministry—Great Lakes West. Contact: Craig Ward (Craig_Ward@ivstaff.org).

Questions to Ask When Reaching Out to Black Students—IV Staff Fred Williams (located on InterVarsity MX).

Race Matters Script—Sheila Nemati, Maya Bey, Sara Marshall, Evan Artis. Script used in “Race Matters” dinner in CA as a creative ways to name racial and ethnic issues that arise in students’ relationships. (Located on InterVarsity MX).

STIM Training Exercises—The Student Training In Missions exercises can be very helpful in getting at issues of race and diversity.

BCM NEXT STEPS SUMMARY

TARGET AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

What are the 3 key obstacles you are seeking to address?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

What two areas of chapter building are weaknesses you need to invest in?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

NEXT STEPS TO TAKE:

What two areas of chapter building are strengths you can capitalize on?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Which strategic tips in particular will be helpful as you take your next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Who are people resources that can help you take your next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

What might be important scriptural and material resources for taking these next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____