**Distinctives of GFM Communities**

GFM New Staff Training Year One

Communities of graduate students and faculty have certain qualities that distinguish them from communities of undergraduate students. Here are several to think about. How will these characteristics shape our approaches to ministry and the way we go about cultivating community?

**Role of the staff worker**: Graduate students are more cautious than undergrads in forming relationships with staff, and faculty are even more so. They are often looking less for leadership direction and help and may have a stronger need for independence. Personal counsel, support and understanding are more critical, but do not need to happen as frequently as with undergraduates to be meaningful. Once trust is earned, the potential for deep, lifelong relationships is great.

**Leaders**: Graduate students are much busier than most undergraduates, making it impossible for them to “double major” in InterVarsity. But it is not impossible to call them to high standards for leadership. Grad student leaders need good training, planning and implementation in meeting times, but can often get more done in fewer meetings. The length of time for which they are able to serve as leaders is both longer (for Ph.D. students) and shorter (for professional students). Professional-school chapters are likely to have more students who fit our culture’s typical images of leadership than graduate chapters of Ph.D. and masters students. We should call leaders to live now as a pattern they are setting for their whole career.

**Commitment level:** The primary commitment of graduate students and faculty will be to their studies and work, not to InterVarsity. This does not mean, however, that there isn’t room for other commitments or that their commitment to the fellowship will be weak.

**Church involvement**: Graduate students and faculty, especially those who are married or have children, are more likely to be actively involved in a church than undergrads. Nearby churches may or may not understand and support their life as a graduate student. InterVarsity staff must strongly encourage their involvement in the local church.

**InterVarsity background**: Many students come to our graduate fellowships with no

InterVarsity experience; others may have been involved with Campus Crusade, Navigators, or other campus ministries. Some students from InterVarsity backgrounds will expect InterVarsity’s graduate ministry to look like the undergraduate ministry.

**Physical/geographic distance**: Most graduate students do not have places on campus where they gather with students from other disciplines, and many professional schools are located in separate sections of campus, in different parts of the city, or even in another city altogether. Some campuses have graduate student housing on campus or a graduate student union which may serve as a hub for ministry. Most professional schools and some departments have informal gathering places, often for eating. Sometimes these are good places for students to connect. Geography and available space is a key factor in chapter strategy. Faculty members are more likely to share collegial relationships with faculty doing similar work around the country and the world than with those in their department.

**Personality types**: Graduate school separates students by personality demographics, because it is career related. Broadly speaking, Ph.D. and masters-level students are often introverts. Many professional students are extroverts. Graduate school often accentuates differences as students are being inculcated into thinking within their discipline Consider the type of thinking, decision-making and communication skills being taught and valued among the students you are seeking to serve as you plan your ministry events. Help students from different parts of the university to connect with and value each other despite the variety of styles.