

SPYING OUT THE LAND¹

Fall 2020

GFM New Staff Training Year One

Introduction

To understand your campus, you must **observe** the campus (through visits, interviews, and exploration), **interpret** this data (by forming hypotheses about campus life and ministry opportunities), **adjust** your hypotheses (based on your observations), and **apply** this knowledge in your ministry. Good inductive bible study skills come in handy when you're getting to know your mission field context: the university.

The following categories and questions offer you some ideas to help you "spy out the land" as you seek to understand the campus milieu better. Whether you are planting a new fellowship, joining an existing campus team, or thinking through campus engagement issues, these categories should clarify your understanding of the university, raise helpful questions, and provide important insights into your ministry goals. It is worth several months of work!

This project will take shape differently depending on your university. If InterVarsity is new to your campus, talk with your Staff Director to determine the focus of your exploration. If not, faculty, students, ministry partners, and former InterVarsity/GFM staff can help you figure out where to start.

1. Contact the administration of the college or university.

If you are planting a new witnessing community on campus, learn the procedure for establishing an InterVarsity graduate chapter on campus or in a professional school. If you work with an established GFM chapter, learn the official procedures for applying for annual recognition by the school, funding, and running a student group on campus.

Build a relationship with the member of the administration responsible for graduate student life and activities. (Bring your chapter president or a missional student, so that they can learn from the experience as well). During your conversation, get a feel for this administrator's attitude towards Christian groups on campus, assessment of student needs, and ability (and willingness) to provide university resources to the chapter. If you work with a focused ministry, (International Students, Black Scholars & Professionals, etc.), try to locate and meet the official university representatives/advocates for this student population.

Obtain copies or access to any handbooks governing student groups on campus. Identify the on-line process and/or the person in charge of scheduling room reservations. Ask them to identify ways that InterVarsity could best reserve appropriate rooms at appropriate times. This is also a good time to research information about an orientation, website/s for student organizations, or places to post announcements. Search the university's website to learn the history of this university.

Note: Identifying the correct people to ask about graduate students on campus can be challenging. Campuses organize for graduate student groups differently from one another.

¹ By Jeanette Yep, revised by Ann Boyd, Greg Jao, Jason Ingalls, Don Paul Gross ('08), Kathy Cooper ('15).

Some campuses will have an overall student activities office for all grad students. Others will organize entirely by academic or professional schools. (Most professional schools have their own student governments and student activities offices.) On other campuses, you may need to talk to the chaplain's office. Be patient, ask lots of questions, and get to know those you meet. This is part of the research!

2. Investigate campus demographics, informal structures, and networks.

Identify the following information through your interviews, the university's website, etc.:

- the total number of undergraduate and graduate students;
- the percentage of students of color among graduate students or in the professional school (including numbers or percentages of each of the major ethnic groups reported by the university);
- the percentage of International graduate students;
- the percentage of residential and commuter graduate students, part-time and full-time students;
- the average age of the typical graduate student;
- the enrollment in the various graduate and professional programs (e.g., how many masters students, how many Ph.D. students, which programs are the largest);
- why most graduate/professional students choose to attend this particular school;
- what graduates of this school typically do after they complete their degrees;
- the total number of faculty, and percentages of tenured/tenure track faculty, adjunct faculty, men/women, and faculty of color (if possible to find this info).

Note: If you are working on several campuses or with several chapters, you will want to research all of them. But give yourself time during your first year to do this work. For New Staff Training, choose the group which will be primary for you and do the research.

3. Spy out the land/campus physically.

Where are the different departments and schools located? Use a campus map and identify these locations.

Discover where grad and professional students hang out. Do faculty have a specific "hang-out" or dining area? Use this as an aid to help you meet various campus affinity groups.

Where do on-campus students live? Do certain types of students and faculty (e.g., first-years, African American students, International students, professional students) congregate in specific dining areas, restaurants, dorms, houses, or apartments? Where do the commuter students tend to live? How do they get to school?



Where does the GFM chapter gather for fellowship meetings? For small groups? For other activities?

Invite GFM students or faculty (or 1-5 ministry partners, if you are planting new ministry) to join you on a prayer walk to the areas that they/you have identified as strategic for the chapter's ministry.

4. Find "cultural informants" and take time to understand people's attitudes.

Briefly interview at least two graduate students, one faculty member, and one administrator who are not a part of InterVarsity's ministry. Invite a GFM student (or faculty) to join you on at least one of these interviews.

- What are their perspectives on:
 - the campus atmosphere/ethos? (You could include questions about spiritual climate, diversity, etc.)
 - the needs of graduate students? (or faculty)
 - the InterVarsity GFM chapter?
- What changes have occurred in the campus' ethos or environment in the past five years?
- Who or what are some of the key influences on campus, or on your focus ministry area? (Consider the faculty, the newspaper, the student government, certain individuals, social groups.)
- To what extent do graduate and professional students feel part of the larger campus?
- What are key campus-wide events?
- What are people on campus (or among your focused ministry area) thinking/talking about?
- What topics are being discussed among graduate students (or faculty)—especially out of the classroom?
- How much time do graduate students spend studying, commuting, working, and playing?
- What do students do during their free time?

5. Understand the existing InterVarsity chapter's ministry.

*Even if you are not new to the GFM chapter, it's still helpful to do an assessment. If you are planting a new GFM chapter, you can skip this section. If you are focusing on faculty ministry, please adapt for a faculty community.



What is the GFM chapter like in terms of personality/tone/ethos? Fruitfulness? How are GFM's Vision and Four Commitments (spiritual formation, community, evangelism & service, and integration of faith, learning and practice) reflected in this group? How would you describe the health and growth of the chapter in each of the 4 Commitments? How do you see the chapter and students becoming a redeeming influence among the people, ideas, and structures of the university? What are historic weaknesses of the chapter? Strengths? Trends?

If possible, interview a former staff member, a faculty advisor, an alumnus, and a student leader (past or present) regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the chapter, as well as the major influences that have shaped it. Veteran staff from your GFM Area team may also have some valuable historical perspectives and strategic insights.

What is the ethnic composition of the chapter, both now and in the past? How about men and women? Has the diversity of the community changed over the years? How would you describe the relationships among and between students of various ethnicities and cultures? Is the chapter seeking to reach out into new communities and populations on campus? How would you describe the level of hospitality in the chapter towards new students and/or those of different ethnicities and cultures?

What happens throughout the year and what traditions are important? How has the chapter been structured (for instance, small groups, large group meetings, prayer meetings, etc., and frequency/priority of these gatherings)? Get a sense of timing of the chapter's annual cycle (New Student Outreach, celebrations, service events, outreach/evangelistic events, retreats, sending off departing students, selecting leaders, leadership planning, leadership transitions).

If you work on a campus with multiple InterVarsity chapters, interview the other InterVarsity staff on campus to understand how the fellowships relate, synergize, or conflict.

Review the past three years of AFR (Annual Field Report) data to identify trends in (a) overall student/faculty numbers, (b) prayer, (c) evangelism, and (d) students/faculty of color and international students/scholars. (Ask your Staff Director to help you access the AFR data.)

6. Identify any other Christian groups (grad and undergraduate).

Check with the administration or the university chaplaincy to find out if there is some sort of gathering for campus ministers and/or religious workers. As you find other full-time campus ministry staff, meet with them and learn about their ministry and share with them what you are doing. Don't overlook Christian ministries for students of color, such as gospel choirs, Chinese Bible studies, Korean fellowships, etc.

Meet with the university's chaplain or official campus minister (or a local pastor). Ask them about their perspectives on the spiritual life on campus, their ministry's history and ethos, and their perspectives on InterVarsity. Are there particular churches that seem to attract more faculty and graduate students? Are there any churches or other campus ministries reaching graduate students? Are there other professional school ministries in existence?

7. Assessment



After doing steps 1-6, write a short report about what you discovered and learned, responding to these questions:

- (a) What are the 10 most important things you learned about the university and the GFM community? What surprised you?
- (b) Write up a description of your university that would take 30 seconds to read out loud. Make sure that it is a snapshot that provides us with a feel for the key issues, struggles, needs or opportunities on campus.
- (c) Given what you've learned, what "windows of opportunity" exist for evangelism on campus?
- (d) What are the key discipleship needs on campus that the GFM community must address to be relevant?
- (e) In what places, situations or relationships did you see injustice on campus?
- (f) Where did you see evidence of the kingdom of God in the university?
- (g) Where/how did you see/experience Jesus as you were "spying out the land"?

