



Reaching the Campus Tribes

(an opening inquiry)

Benson Hines

mobile version
part two: chapters three and four

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

This version was originally made for mobile users. All the original text has been “remastered” for smaller dimensions, with smaller pictures. Visit the site above for the primary version, other resources, or for ways to join in the cause. Important information and interesting tidbits can also be found on [the back pages](#).

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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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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.

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 re-

sound with leaders in other countries, but it is important to recognize the severe differences between American college ministry and some collegiate work elsewhere.

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.



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 denomination, 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.

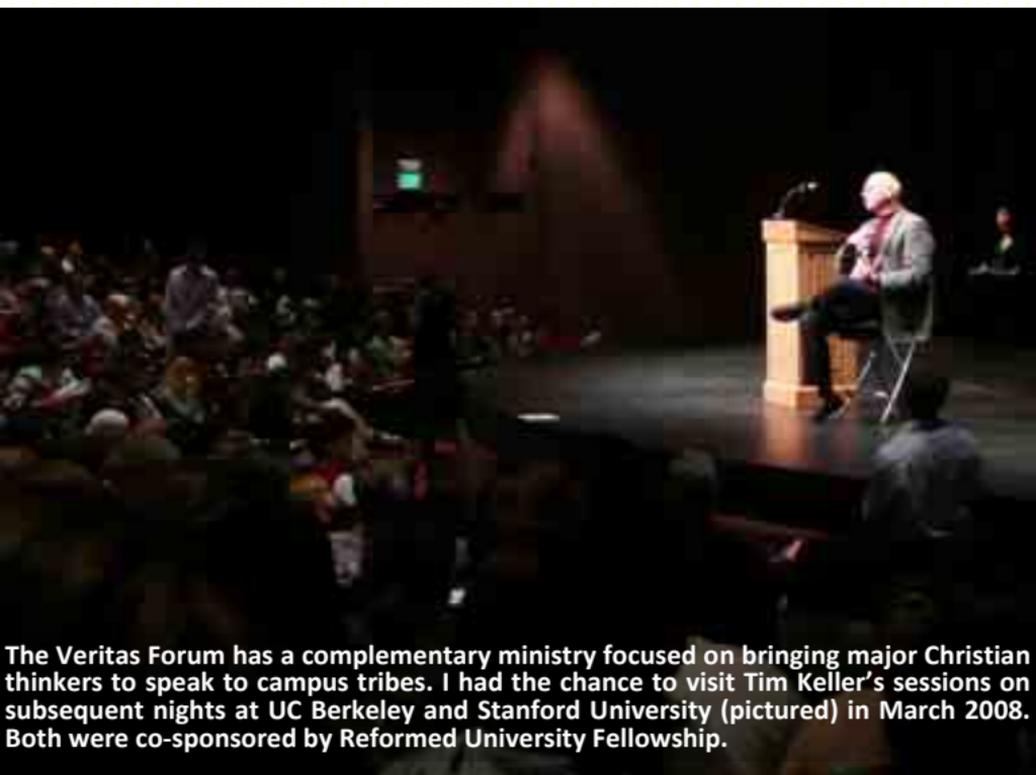
All too often, these assumptions turn out to be untrue.

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 ministry 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 Colle-

giate Attention Gap – is extremely prevalent and affects millions of students on an annual basis.



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.

the Gap in churches

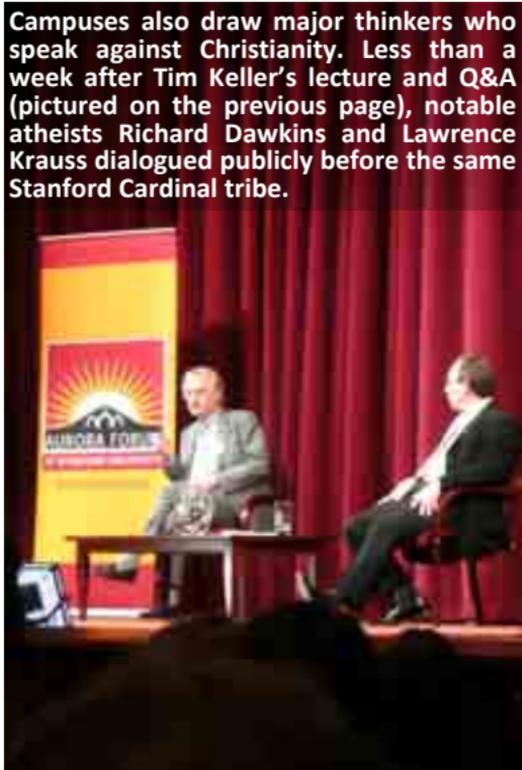
Of course, churches offer the clearest instances of the Collegiate Attention Gap. Despite the heavy emphasis on ministering to children and youth, many congregations make unapologetically lackluster attempts

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 they do see that their church's ministry to them basically stops after high

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



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 nonexistent 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



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.

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 students may personally experi-

ence 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



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.

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 seminar-

ies, it is not taught at all.



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.”

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 col-

lege 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 while *also* working



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

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



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.

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 col-

lege 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.

We might dub this very common malady the "Turbulent Ten Years," because a *decade*

or more might be spent starting and re-starting 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 ministries 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.



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.

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.

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.



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.

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 in-

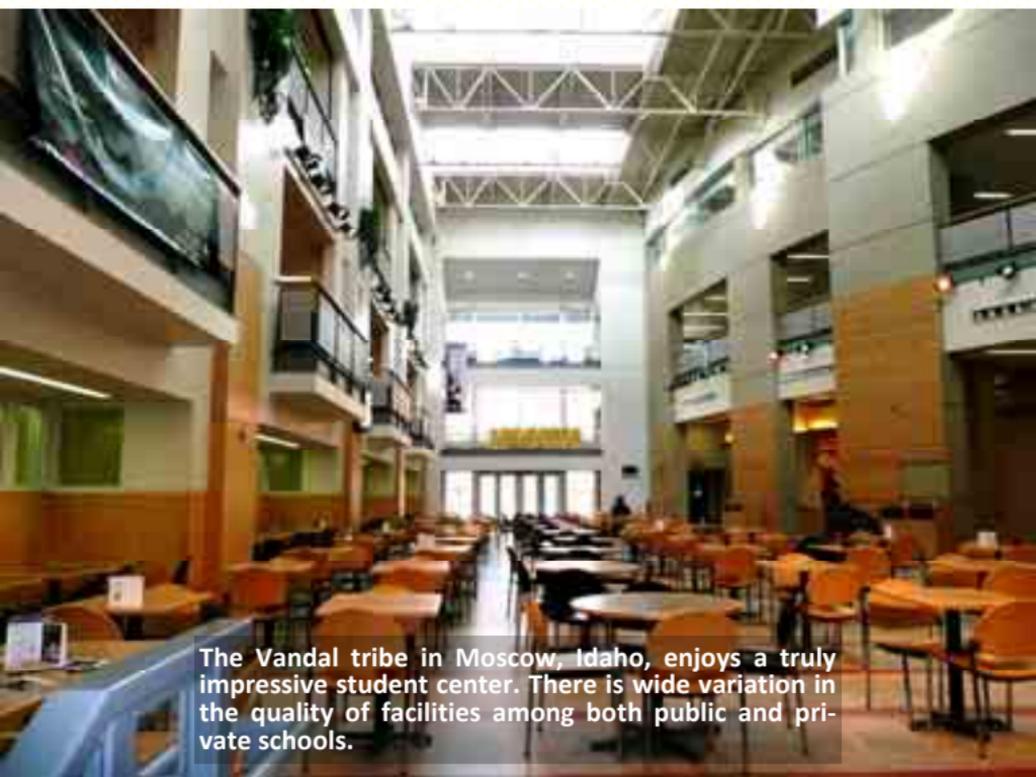
creasing the effectiveness, breadth of reach, or excellence of ministry activity. Long-lasting ministries may look much the same as they did a decade ago – and are probably seeing similar results. Worse, as campuses and students steadily change, unchanging ministries can easily see their former success 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 re-

main 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.



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.

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 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 disciple-

ship 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. Often-

times 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 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.

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 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 min-

istry 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 re-

sult. 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 dol-

lars 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.



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.

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.



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.

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 and respond with passion – but not necessarily with wisdom. On any single campus, that can mean that local



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.

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 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.

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.





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).



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

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 introduce 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 University 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. 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 organizations, 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



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.

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 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.



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.

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, diffi-

culty 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.

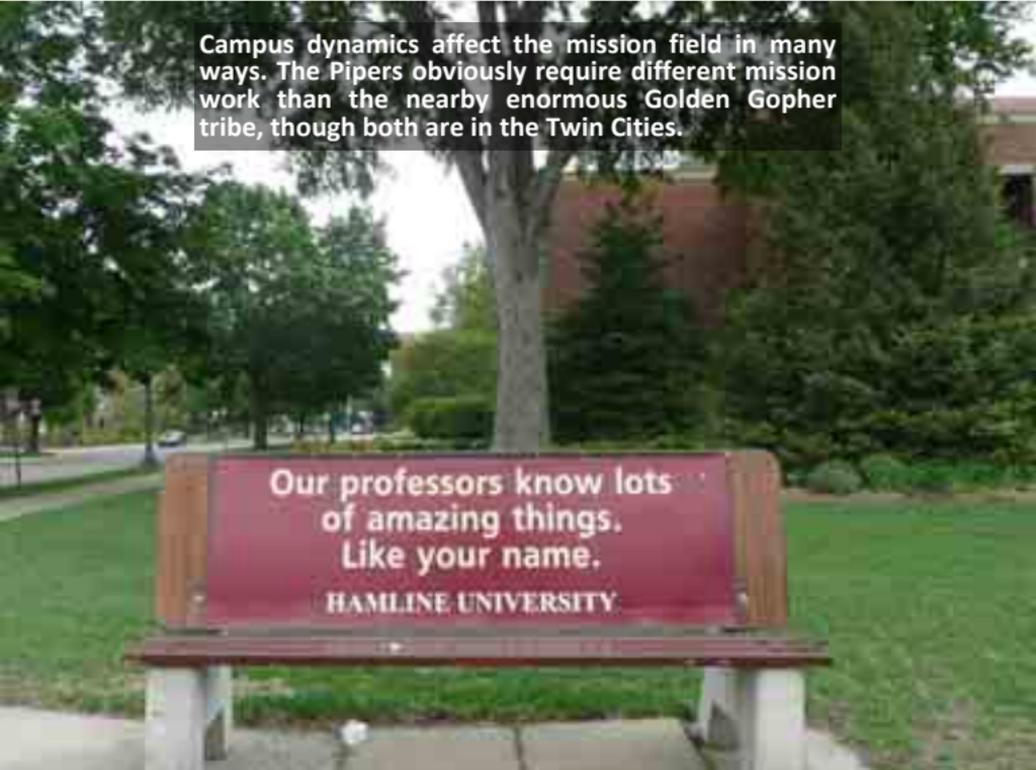
Yet these same ministers are often profoundly encouraged when they realize that college ministry truly is a sort of *missions* – and that they are *missionaries*.

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.



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.

Our professors know lots
of amazing things.
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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 ri-

diculous 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 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 work to make it genius.



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.

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 de-

velop 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.



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.

Since there is no “college ministry in a box,” college ministry formation that is both quick *and healthy* will be rare. College stu-

dents 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 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 un-

derstanding of how these specialized types of ministry work. A desire to reach college students must be matched with a willingness to wait – just as we are willing to give worldwide missions efforts a chance to thrive.



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.

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 “large,” “small,” or somewhere in between, we must simply make

sure that we are actively progressing toward having the *best* ministry we possibly can.



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.

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 numeri-

cal 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 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.

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.

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.



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 invest-

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



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.

“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.

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.

TUFTS UNIV.

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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.

DAVIS

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 experi-

ence” 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 tal-

ents. 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.

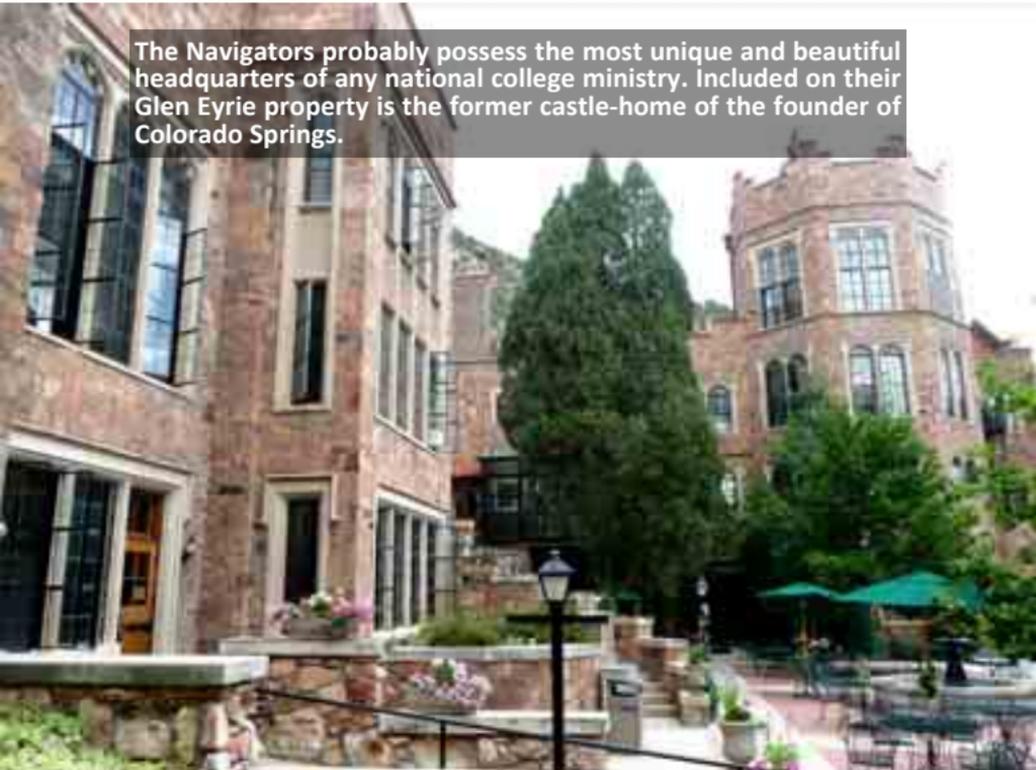
The need for cooperation is simply a reality. There will probably be no time soon when parachurch organizations disappear from campuses, when churches place all their collegiate discipleship in the hands of campus-based groups, when multiple local college ministries combine into a single outpost reaching 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 ministry, 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 minis-

try – 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.

A photograph of a courtyard with brick buildings, a large tree, and outdoor seating. The buildings are multi-story with many windows. A large, dark green tree stands in the center. In the foreground, there is a stone wall and a black metal railing. To the right, there is an outdoor seating area with green umbrellas and tables.

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.

college ministry is missions

Even if outsiders to college ministry strug-

gle 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.

Thanks for reading chapters 3 and 4 of *Reaching the Campus Tribes*!

In the next part of the book, I look at several reasons we *should* use greater means to reach college students. Chapter 5 lays out many reasons college ministry matters, Chapter 6 answers practical concerns about investing in this, and then comes the book's compelling conclusion: a visit to New Student Orientation.

To read the earlier or next chapters, go to reachingthecampustribes.com/mobile.

The next pages contain important info from the back pages of the full book.

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 year-long 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.