

ESL Ministry To International College Students

Every year all the nations in the world literally send their best and brightest college students to study in the United States. These students will be the future leaders of their countries. If your church is close (within 30 miles) of a college or university, you have the wonderful opportunity to reach these international college students with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in both Word and Deed.

International college students generally fall into two categories of study. The first category is taking only ESL (English as a Second Language) Classes to become proficient enough in English to pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). These classes are usually sponsored by a smaller program within the university. Some are called English Language Centers, English Language Institutes, etc...

The 2nd category of international college student has already passed the TOEFL and is taking classes to get a specific college degree. Many of these will be Masters and PhD level students.

There are several ways to minister to these students using ESL. However, the most important part of ministering to these students starts before you even set one foot on the campus. You must start praying for this ministry and potential students as soon as God lays it on your heart as a possibility. Get groups within your church to pray for this.

START AN ESL SCHOOL AT YOUR CHURCH

If you have a full ESL School at your church (offer ESL classes in various fluency levels), get permission from the university to distribute fliers advertising your ESL School. Once you have permission you can leave them in public places, attach them to message boards, set up a booth during special activities, and just walk around handing them out to students. Another route is to ask chartered campus ministries (i.e. Navigators, InterVarsity, RUFU, Campus Crusade) to hand out your fliers for you. You should stress in your fliers that students in your school will have the opportunity to make American friends and visit in American homes. (75% of international college students will never have an American friend and most of them will never go inside an American home.) Make sure there is a good map to your church.

Mostly students that are attending regular classes will be interested in attending an ESL School. Those taking ESL classes all day long don't want to take more ESL classes. But Masters and PhD level students in particular like to have a place to go to improve their English. Make sure that in your Advanced ESL classes (where most of these will place), that you offer the students the opportunity to practice oral presentations in front of the class and/or teachers. They welcome the feedback on their pronunciation and grammar because they do not want to be embarrassed in front of their peers on campus. If possible, also offer them the option of having a teacher read through a written assignment before they turn it in on campus and go over it with them. Again, they want to sound as American as possible and do not want to be embarrassed by spelling and/or grammar mistakes.

These students, in particular, want to learn about American culture. Within your regular class periods, you can incorporate lessons on American weddings, funerals, proms, etc...

These Masters and PhD level international college students many times have spouses living in apartments near the university that speak little to no English. Many times these spouses feel completely isolated in this foreign culture and new language. They can benefit from the lower fluency level classes that your ESL School offers and also from the friendship that they can find with your teachers and volunteers.

You can also invite international college students that do not attend your regular ESL classes to specific activities that you are having for your ESL classes. For instance, if you are having a big Thanksgiving Party outside of class (i.e. on a Saturday night), then you could create a flier about this for the campus. Make sure to have people RSVP (make the instructions on how to do this very clear). Also, encourage your ESL students that are college students to invite their friends to these events.

Hopefully through your ESL classes, you will be able to develop relationships with these international college students. You will begin to know what their specific needs are and try to meet them. You may be able to help them with finding free or low cost furniture. You can help them through the maze of red tape at the driver's license office, etc...

Once relationships have developed, you can begin to offer Bible Studies and/or Book Clubs using Christian material (see website for more information on these) specifically for international college students. These could be at your church or in a home (yours or the students). To have them on campus, you will need permission from the university or be part of a chartered ministry.

For information on how to start an ESL School, please refer back to the ESL website homepage (Steps to starting an ESL Ministry). It might also be helpful to read the article on getting the Gospel into secular curriculums.

PARTICIPATE IN THE CAMPUS' CONVERSATION PARTNER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Many times colleges and universities will have a program called Conversation Partners (or maybe Friendship Partners). This is a program whereby a volunteer (from the campus in general or from the surrounding community) meets each week with an assigned international college student for at least one hour just so the student can practice their English in a nonthreatening setting. Check with your local university to find out if they have this kind of program and how you can volunteer. Usually you can ask for a specific country and gender. According to what kinds of students (see categories above) are enrolled, your assigned student may speak a lot of English or not very much. Usually you are asked to commit for just one semester at a time. Most colleges have partners come to a special meeting where they meet their assigned student. Then you and the student decide when you will meet each week and where (on the campus in a public place). Usually you would meet for about an hour. You should be provided with a set of conversation starters to use if needed.

This is not a Bible Study. It is a time to make a new friend. The goal is to develop a relationship with your student and this takes time. Hopefully you can have the student for more than one semester. Once you are comfortable with your student, you can

invite him/her to your home for an activity. In the course of your friendship, you can hopefully share your testimony and some Scripture. If you get to know your student well enough they will probably start to ask you about your faith. Remember to ask them questions about themselves, their family, their culture and their religion.

If your church has an ESL School, you can invite your student to come to one of their big activities (i.e. Thanksgiving Party) with you. If several people from your church are Conversation Partners plan monthly activities with them and their students such as field trips and game nights.

START YOUR OWN CONVERSATION PARTNER PROGRAM

If your local campus does not have a Conversation Program that you can tap into, then you can start one of your own.

First you need to recruit volunteers from your church (and possibly other churches in your community). You may want to have them go through a short training or orientation. You should provide conversation starters in case they are needed. Contact Nancy Booher at nbooher@pcanet.org if you are interested in having MNA provide this training/orientation for you.

Once you have volunteers lined up, start advertising on the campus (see ideas above). Create an easy English brochure describing what you are doing. You can advertise this as Conversation Partners or Friendship Partners.

Organizationally, you can do this one of two ways:

1. You can either structure it like above where a partner meets a student on campus
2. Or you can have a specific night at the church when students come to meet their partners.

If you choose to do it at your church, then you would try to have students meet with the same partner each week. But sometimes you might have to put them with someone else and might have to put more than one student with one volunteer. In addition, instead of each grouping deciding what to talk about, you can have specific topics for the evening by providing conversation starters for each table grouping. (Refer back to website: Conversation Corner.)

Additionally you should offer other outside activities that get these international college students into your homes.

Remember that this activity again is not specifically Bible based. It is relationally based. As you get to know your student(s) you will be able to share the Gospel in Word and Deed. Again, as you learn their specific needs you may be able to help them. As relationships develop, you can then invite them to Bible based activities.

You could open each evening with prayer and do a short devotional (5 minutes) in an English fluency level that meets the needs of most of your students.

WORK WITH AN RUF INTERNATIONAL GROUP ON CAMPUS

RUF (Reformed University Fellowship International) is a PCA college ministry. They have campus ministers assigned to many universities

for the purpose of welcoming students from all nations and equipping Christians and churches for international hospitality. They would be delighted to have the involvement and support of a local church.

Ask them what your congregation can do to support their ministry. Perhaps you can sponsor a field trip or activity. You could invite them to have a dinner or game night in your home. Invite members of your congregation to come to these activities and befriend the international college students.

If your local campus does not have an RUFII ministry, consider asking your church and Presbytery to call an ordained PCA campus minister and start one.

For more information on RUFII, please contact Al LaCour at alacour@ruf.org or go to www.rufinternational.org

For information in general about using ESL to reach international college students, please contact Nancy Booher at nbooher@pcanet.org or 410-465-0154.