



# **GOD'S WORLD ON YOUR DOORSTEP**

Connecting with international students on your campus

This paper was developed as part of a seminar for IFES World Assembly 2019 in South Africa.

More details regarding the resources mentioned in this guide are available via the Sobremesa community on IFES Connect: [connect.ifesworld.org](https://connect.ifesworld.org)

See also [sobremesa.ifesworld.org](https://sobremesa.ifesworld.org)

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## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORLD: CONNECTING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**From the beginning, the university has been a place of gathering. A destination for students and scholars from across a nation, but also from abroad.**

**But there has never been such a global movement of students like there is today. It has become a movement *from everywhere to everywhere*.**

The opportunity for the gospel to flourish among these international students and scholars is huge. This is not just a random series of events. It is all part of God's ultimate purpose for history and mankind.

*"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."*

ACTS 17:26

Prominent world leaders who studied abroad include:

- Kofi Anan, former UN Secretary General, studied in the USA and Switzerland
- Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist, studied at ETH Zürich, Switzerland
- Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer of Google LLC, studied at Stanford University, USA
- Sigmund Freud, Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, spent several months at a marine biology research station in Trieste, Italy
- Michael Lomonossow, Russian polymath, scientist and writer, studied at the University of Marburg, Germany
- Daniel Bourdanne, former IFES General Secretary, studied in Chad, Cameroon, Togo, France and Côte d'Ivoire

International students are generally longing for friendships; they are eager to learn and are open to new ideas. And they often hunger for God's word and are open to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*"One way God has worked behind the scenes is through the huge spread of international students across the world, especially since the 1960s. Their numbers run into millions, from countries such as China, Greece, India, Malaysia, France, Japan and Turkey. They are often the crème de la crème of their societies, returning home to become leaders in academia, business, the civil service and politics. This makes a ministry amongst them very strategic in world mission. As they travel from their home countries, they leave behind their roots and expose themselves to other influences, including the possibility of gospel influences."*

LINDSAY BROWN, SHINING LIKE STARS (2010)

### RESOURCES

- *Shining Like Stars. The Power of the Gospel in the World's Universities.* Lindsay Brown
- [Migration through the eyes of faith](#). IFES Word & World, Issue 1

## HOW TO SHOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

### HOSPITALITY: FIRST TO WELCOME

Welcome international students to your country, but also welcome them as an ambassador of the kingdom of Jesus. You might be the first or only Christian they will meet and who will pray for them.

### FRIENDSHIP

Work at becoming friends. There is great value in friendship and relationships, particularly across cultural and religious divides. Friendship must be the first step if we want to share the gospel with people from other cultures. Friendships are built on mutual understanding and respect. Friends are more willing to learn more about why our faith is important to us.

### RECIPROCITY

Our relationships with international students should not be one directional, where we are always giving, and they are always receiving. Create a space that allows for reciprocal relationships; a space where students are welcome to receive but also welcome to give. In other words, create a space where everyone can contribute as a full member of the community. This also prevents an imbalance of power in the relationship.

### LOVE

Love your international friends just as you would want to be loved when in another country. Be a joyful witness of what Christ has done for you.

But, let your activities be natural, not forced. Share joyfully, but do not force Jesus. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you and to work in the lives of your international friends.

### FOOD

Love can often be given and received via the stomach, and food plays a central part in hospitality in many cultures. It helps to provide a relaxed atmosphere. Check for religious or dietary preferences, and remember Muslims do not eat pork, and Hindus do not eat beef.

### HEALTHY RE-ENTRY

International students are temporary visitors in your country, coming from and returning to their own communities. Helping students to prepare for healthy re-entry is a vital part of our ministry. The ultimate success of our ministry is when students return well and contribute meaningfully to the church in their home context.

### BE SENSITIVE TO POLITICS

Avoid talking about politics before a friendship is formed. Often these debates will close the door for the gospel rather than bring your friend closer to Jesus. Do not make broad negative statements about Islam or Hinduism, for example, and do not speak disrespectfully of Muhammad, Holy books, and similar items of religious and cultural significance. Instead, speak joyfully of your own faith.

After a trusting friendship is established, discussions about politics can open doors and lead to conversations about the need for Jesus in our countries and in our world. We can ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and sensitivity, and remind ourselves that the friendship comes first.

### **NO ALCOHOL**

Do not serve alcoholic drinks in your meetings and events. This may cause confusion or offence for international students from Muslim or Hindu contexts, but also for Christian students from other cultural contexts.

### **MEN TO MEN, WOMEN TO WOMEN**

When building friendships with international students, focus on relationships with those of the same gender as yourself, being aware of different cultural expectations around the roles of men and women. Avoid the opportunity for motives for forming a friendship to cause confusion or otherwise be misunderstood.

### **MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

We all have different ways of doing things that may cause surprise or shock on either side. Try to avoid cross-cultural faux pas.

Stay relaxed and do not be afraid. Misunderstandings are inevitable in any genuine relationship. These moments are opportunities to practice humility. When friendship exists there will be forgiveness, greater understanding, and even some fun stories to laugh about in the future.

Be encouraged that students really love receiving invitations and will normally overlook any cultural blunders when they are extended with warmth and love. Love has the power to heal most cultural misunderstandings.

### **SECURITY ISSUES**

Remember that the cost of becoming a Christian is usually far higher for a Muslim or a Hindu than it is for a nominal Christian or agnostic. Keep security issues in mind when contacting students from sensitive countries.

## BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS: PHASES OF CULTURAL TRANSITION

### INITIAL CULTURE SHOCK

When international students first arrive in their host country, they may suffer some degree of culture shock as they experience aspects of life which are different from life at home. In this new context, things that were once so easy suddenly become difficult. Even a trip to buy groceries can feel intimidating and frustrating as students learn which stores sell which items, and learn which brands are reliable.

As students interact with more locals in their host country, differences in communication styles and language barriers can become more apparent as well. As a result, students might begin to feel alienated and frustrated with the local culture and the new life they had once looked forward to.

How can we walk alongside our friends to lessen the shock of these differences?

- Pray for your international friends.
- Be a good host and cultural guide.
- Help with their practical needs, accompany them on errands, and proactively offer assistance.

### STAGES OF CULTURAL TRANSITION



One may actually experience several high and low points in each transition. Also, multiple and simultaneous "U" curves may be experienced, with academic adjustment happening at a different rate than social or emotional transition, for example. Created by Lisa Espineli Chinn and David Polluck. © 2011 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

### THE REALITY OF REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

For most international students their time abroad is temporary. But if they have met Jesus, that relationship will last for eternity!

It is well known that entering a new culture and country can be a stressful experience. But the same is also true for returning to one's home culture, often called 're-entry'.

After completing their studies, many international students will return home, and face the challenges of reverse culture shock.

For students who have become Christians in another culture, they will have to learn how to be a Christian in their own culture, finding a local church to settle into. For students who were seriously exploring Christianity or thinking about spiritual matters, they will have to find new ways to keep this a priority in their life back home.

What can we do to support our international friends?

- Pray for your international friends.
- Prepare your friends for re-entry by using the workbook *Think Home*.
- Connect your friends with other Christians in their home country, either through IFES groups or local churches.
- Contact [IFES movements](#) to help connect and find support.

## RESOURCES

- *Think Home: A Guide for International Students Preparing to Return Home*. Lisa E. Chinn

## ALLOW GOD TO LEAD YOU TO THOSE HE WANTS TO MEET THROUGH YOU

**International students have impacted countries and societies, in their home context and in their host context.**

### A BIBLICAL STORY

<sup>26</sup>As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza."<sup>27</sup>So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship,<sup>28</sup>and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup>The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."<sup>30</sup>Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"<sup>31</sup>The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.<sup>32</sup>The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth."<sup>33</sup>He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."<sup>34</sup>The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?"<sup>35</sup>So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.<sup>36</sup>As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?"<sup>38</sup>He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.<sup>39</sup>When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.<sup>40</sup>Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

ACTS 8:26-40, NIV

### What are some observations you make about this text?

- The leadership of the Holy Spirit.
- The centrality of the gospel.
- The importance of a faithful and willing witness.
- The impact of this person on their home country.
- The possibility of building an IFES movement elsewhere through an international student.

### RESOURCES

- *Crossing Cultures with Jesus: Sharing Good News with Sensitivity and Grace*. Katie J. Rawson  
ISBN: 9780830844388
- *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*. Jayson Georges  
ISBN: 978-0692338018
- *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Culture: How Who You Are Shapes What You Do*. Patty Lane  
ISBN: 0830823468

## BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS: INVOLVE OTHERS

**Create an international community on your campus.**

### 1. PRAYER

Prayer must be the foundation of any work for God. Ask God for a heart for the nations and for international students. Ask God what he has in mind for your university and ask him to bless you with contacts with internationals. Ask God to lead you to the right people. Join in with [World Student Day](#) each year to unite in prayer with others, especially for international students on your campus.

### 2. STARTING ON YOUR OWN

If it's just you:

- make friends with international students at university
- introduce students to your Christian friends
- invite students to your home
- invite students to study the bible with you
- invite students to church
- Join your university's international society

### 3. FINDING A TEAM

It can be helpful to find others to support and partner with you. Where might you find support and co-workers?

- local student group
- Christian international students
- Christian graduates
- local churches

### 4. ANALYZE CONTEXT

The following questions can help you to find out about international students and the steps you might want to take.

- Who are the international students in your city? How many are there? Where are they from? When do they arrive and leave?
- Learn about the diversity of international students by reading and observing. What are their religious and cultural backgrounds?
- What are the needs – physical, emotional, spiritual – of international students in your city or university?
- What are your gifts? In what areas does God want to challenge you to step out of your comfort zone?
- What opportunities are available to you? Look for doors that God has already opened or could open to you.

## 5. MEETING STUDENTS

One great way to meet international students is to simply start conversations with your international classmates. Go to where international students gather – cafés, student club meetings, international student centre – and start building relationships there.

Another way is by planning events that you can invite international students to.

- Think of a concept such as an International Café, International Food Night, Seekers Bible Study, Language Club.
- Consider a *Peace Feast* if you have Muslim students you are seeking to reach. You can find out more about this in the Sobremesa community on IFES Connect: [connect.ifesworld.org](https://connect.ifesworld.org)
- Make a plan. What do you want to do in your program? When and where should it take place? What language should you use? How will you invite students?
- Issue invitations: personal invitation, leaflets, orientation week, student residence, social media.
- At the event itself, be the first to welcome and have fun. Friendship is key.

**Remember, it is not about the best activities, but about love and friendship!**

## 6. FOLLOW UP

Follow up with new friends and spend time together outside of organised events to build friendship.