

Four Sites and Practices of Engagement: Overview

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How do we engage the whole university for Christ?

Let's be practical.

We have a wonderful resource in the universal church as it is situated on campuses.

We see the creativity of God's people in:

- Things tried
- Things succeeded
- Things failed
- Things adapted

How can we imagine programming in ways that . . .

- Reaches *all* of the university life through the eyes of faith?
- Engages through *conversations*?

One way of thinking systematically about how to be practical is to imagine engagement occurring in two dimensions:

Where it occurs – and that may be kept within Christian circles in the university or extended to the university as a whole

How it occurs – and here we may think of two approaches: *informal* ways of engaging in dialog and conversation; and *formal* ways of creating programs and events that stimulate dialog.

Where we combine these two dimensions we have four sites for engagement (see Table, **Practicalities of Engagement**):

- A. Informally *Within* Christian Circle
- B. Formally *Within* Christian Circle
- C. *Informally* Within the Whole University
- D. *Formally* Beyond the Christian Circle to the Whole University

Practicalities of Engagement

Locus	Within Christian circles	Within Whole University
Approaches		
Informal	Conversations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Listening ○ Questioning 	Conversations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Listening ○ Questioning
Formal	Passion talks & variations Faculty presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By Christians ○ By non-Christians 	Panels Inter-group discussions Seminar Training programs

A. Informally *Within* Christian Circle

We can start with an assumption that we are in the university:

- To learn
- To think
- To expand horizons
- To be creative

So, throughout the academic year in our Christian groups we *converse* with students, administrative staff and faculty.

Two main elements of conversing are:

[1] Refining the Practice of Questioning

- Start easy with questions like: what did you study as an under-graduate? What was the topic of your Honors thesis? Your Master's thesis?
- What is your current focus? Subject concentration?
- [If relevant], do you already know your research topic? What is it? What kinds of methods? What kinds of data, materials, etc., are you working with?
- Indicate connections with the interests of the person with whom you are conversing.
 - E.g., "I studied 'x' or 'y'."
 - E.g., Laugh at yourself. "The closest I've come to that is a movie, or novel."
 - E.g., Or you might say, "I read something in the Science section of a newspaper about that and it piqued my interest."
 - E.g., Or, "I had a friend in college who was working on something similar."

- Raise questions that press for simplification – finding a level of common language /lingua franca.
E.g., “I am not sure I understand that. Could you say it in another way? Could you give me an example?”
E.g., “Let me see if I understand you. Are you saying that...?”
- Ask questions that invite analogies or metaphors
- Ask clarifying questions – what does this mean?

[2] Refining the Practice of Listening

- For the problem or issue someone is grappling with – say it back “to be sure you understand”
- For emotion – what *excites* this person? Can you discern where does their passion kick in?
- For the big divides, debates – where do the scholarly fault-lines lie?
- For handles to help me grasp complexity

HINT: as a rule of thumb, is the other person talking more than me?

B. Formally *Within* Christian Circle

There are now many practices in different parts of the world where Christian student groups have designed formal events to engage the issues, research and debates of the university.

1. Faculty/Student Passion talks – Stanford model
(See module *Passion Talks: Stanford Model*)
2. Faculty/Passion talks – 7 variations
(See module *Passion Talks: Seven Variations*)

Variation #1 - T-3 Events

- Australian movement the Simeon Network movement of engaging the university in Australia.
- *Thinking Truth Together*
- One-day events in major Australian cities like Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane.
- Each person only gets 5 or 10 minutes to make a very quick presentation about their discipline and some kind of faith connection
- A little bit of follow-up discussion.

Very quick, very sharp.

Initially only permitted presenters to attend

Variation #2 / 2b - T-3 Events Modified

- Not only inviting presenters, but others
- Now:
 - Days 1-2 on T-3 presentations
 - Moving into writing workshops.

Variation #3 - Lightning Talks

- Fast and maybe appropriate to people just getting going.
- This is what I am working on, these are the questions I have thought about, maybe here is a connection or two. What do you think?

Suited to beginning of academic year?

Sends signals – this gp is going to take on serious issues in the university

Variation #4 - Faculty Talks - Full Scale Papers

- University of Queensland
- Advanced doctoral students, post-docs, and faculty.
- 20-30 page papers
- Persons from any discipline. Compels persons to reach non-specialists.

Variation #5 - Young Scholars and a Step by Step Development Opportunity

- Young faculty and doctoral students – ANU, IR
- Half-day or a one day conference
- Write a three page extended abstract of what we imagine could be an article.
- 30" discussing each person's abstract.
- Potential follow-on -- write papers -- symposium to a theological-academic review

Variation #6 - Faculty Presentations on Current Interests / Puzzles

- Not exactly a passion talk
- Invite faculty -- 'What is exciting you right now?' 'What are you puzzling about right now?' 'What is something you are right in the middle of?'
- Tapping into the faculty person's energy -- throwing it open
- No matter how senior -- always struggling with issues

Variation #7 - Graduate Chapter and Under-graduate Chapter Interaction

- Passion talks between the grad-chapters and undergrad chapters?
- Grad-students come in a given sort of mini-passion talks to the undergrads
- Becomes a way the grads and the undergrads can have a conversation together.
- Anticipation of mentored

3. Bringing in Non-Christian Faculty

These are faculty who might not be Christians but are known to be persons sympathetic to issues the Christian group is considering.

Invite them to speak on research *or* topics that motivate them . . .

AND

Ask them to pose questions with which they think Christians – or any religious believers – should grapple [could be done jointly with other campus religious groups

C. Informally to the Whole University

Back to *conversations* – now we move outside the Christian comfort zone.

1. It is critical to learn how to question & listen.

(This is why practicing questioning inside a supportive Christian group can be so helpful as preparation).

- i. learn how to question – how to learn from other people about their field
 - The academic problems that they encounter
 - How they think about them
 - Whether they reach to ethical or policy or transcendent issues
 - ii. Does learning to question in campus groups start with InterVarsity staff themselves learning these skills?
 - iii. When staff get trained, then they will learn to question their graduate students. In turn, graduate students will get to learn to question each other.
2. Think comprehensively about *who* are conversation partners in the university:
(See module *Who are our conversation partners?*)

Those we run into . . . classes, dorms, labs, sports groups, university clubs, etc.

Those we invite . . .

TH: lunch with doc students, faculty

Think also of university administrators – student affairs, others – what problems are they grappling with – how can we pray for them?

D. Formally Beyond the Christian Circle – To the Whole University

Here are several approaches that have been used in university settings.

1) Invitations to co-sponsor events of common interest

- E.g., when I have been invited by Christian groups to speak on campus about my research, I ask them to try and sponsor my talk with other student groups.
- E.g., in my research on China at Northwestern University Law School, the event was co-sponsored by the student Human Rights group and the Asia Student Association.

2) Inter-group discussions/cooperation

- Consider any topic that any religious group will be concerned about, e.g., religious freedom on campus or protection of weak or disadvantaged or vulnerable students on campus.
- Find common ground for campus groups on these issues.
- Invite other groups to discuss these jointly with Christian groups.

3) Formal seminars/workshops

- Here academic seminars or workshops or conferences can be organized in universities that include Christian faculty or Christian themes.
- E.g., Forgiveness distinguished lecture at University of Chicago Law School by Dean of Harvard Law School

- E.g., Northwestern University Conference on Light across disciplines in which theologians and a New Testament scholar were included that was introduced by the President of the university and published in a book.

4) Training programs

- i. To deal with depression, suicide – the pathologies of graduate work
E.g., the teams organized by the Nigerian IFES movement (NIFES)

- ii. To offer skills training
A Christian group on campus can lead the way on academic skills that make a difference in scholarly life. These include:
 - How to give an effective presentation
 - How to listen
 - How to converse

- iii. To enable faculty/students to develop supportive roles in education as nurturers, careers, encouragers.

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