

Engaging Internationals – Discerning Your Approach

International students in InterVarsity are generally involved in three chapter settings*:

- ISM (Stand-Alone) chapters: designed primarily for international students
- Multinational (M/N) chapters: any chapter that isn't exclusively for international students but intentionally includes them in its mission and practice
- Emerging Multinational (EMN) chapters: chapters with international student involvement through little intentionality or effort to include them

ISM and M/N chapters are both recommended approaches, and a chapter can evolve from one approach to another intentionally or unintentionally. Chapters may be “hybrids” – be in transition or have characteristics of two or more types. Read on to better recognize or determine which approach best suits a specific context, and to grow international involvement in different settings.

Here are the top determining factors for which approach fits your context:

Up to 1 in 3 students on your campus can be an international. Over 1 million internationals are here. Are you ready to welcome the world on your campus?

1. Cultural Assimilation

The more assimilated the internationals, the more they naturally integrate into a primarily American chapter. Campus cultures and contexts can also promote assimilation (ex. small liberal arts schools tend to foster integration into the mainstream culture and a smaller international student population may force internationals to integrate). See cultural continuum:

Internationals most separate from Americans----- Internationals most integrated with Americans

Separation		Adaptation		Assimilation
Ethnic or language specific outreach	Stand-alone ISM Chapter (internationals from multiple nations)	ISM as a branch or “mini-chapter” within the main chapter	ISM small group as one of many small group options	Internationals involved in all aspects of the chapter
<i>How one chapter could have multiple approaches across the continuum</i>				
Quran and Bible discussions with internationals not involved in the rest of the chapter	Chinese-speaking small group that’s minimally involved in the chapter	Faith & Chai event with both international and Americans involved	ISM small group with internationals participating and leading	Internationals as worship team member, chapter president, etc.

How would you describe the majority of the internationals on your campus or the ones you're drawn to reach? Where do they stand on the cultural continuum above?

2. Available Resources or Laborers

You may or may not have enough laborers for more than one chapter. *What resources (staff, volunteers, supervisory or coaching support etc.) do you currently have?*

3. Vision

ISM chapters are best for those who want to primarily influence internationals, while Emerging Multinational chapters are for those who want to primarily influence Americans. Multinational are best for

those who have a vision to influence both-to see Americans become global citizens, embracing a global perspective on discipleship and Scripture, and to see internationals as insiders invited to the table. *What's your vision for your chapter? Who do you want your students to become? Who do you want to influence?*

4. God's Leading

Finally, God may be leading you to a model or approach that may not fit neatly with the factors above. *Which approach(es) is God leading you to? What next step is he nudging you to take to involve more international students?*

Discernment for Next Steps

See chapter category descriptions and recommendations below, then work through these questions:

1. Which chapter category or examples above best describe your context currently?
2. Reflect on the questions in the four determining factors (above):
 - a. How would you describe the majority of the internationals on your campus or the ones you're drawn to reach? Where do they stand on the cultural continuum above?
 - b. What resources (staff, volunteers, supervisory or coaching support etc.) do you currently have?
 - c. What's your vision for your chapter? Who do you want your students to become? Who do you want to influence?
 - d. Which approach(es) is God leading you to? What next step is he nudging you to take to involve more international students?

...there before
me was a great
multitude that
no one could
count, from
every nation,
tribe, people
and language,
standing before
the throne...
Revelation 7:9

*Note: ISM chapters are equivalent to Tier 1, M/N chapters to Tier 2, EMN to Tier 3

Multinational Chapter

Americans and Internationals partner through shared leadership, ownership, and vision. Both have their voices heard and needs met. They're not only multiethnic but multinational.

Examples

Just as ice cream toppings can be served mixed in, sprinkled on top, or on the side, internationals can be involved in a chapter in at least three primary ways:

- "On the side" - ISM outreach as a branch of chapter
 - Weekly meal/discussion followed by optional Bible study led by internationals.
 - Reaching Muslims - attend their events, build relationships, lead informal GIGs
- "Sprinkled on top" - ISM-specific ministry well-connected to the core of the chapter
 - ISM small group, American student-led
 - Chinese-speaking small group, co-led by Chinese student and church volunteer
 - Monthly all-chapter international potluck
- "Mixed in" -no separate ISM structures
 - Intentional investment in an international who becomes a follower, is empowered and developed as a leader (first as an apprentice then later as chapter leader)
 - Leadership selection strategically includes internationals in leadership
 - Worship team invites international student guest leaders to teach songs in their native language

Top Strengths

- Powerful **multi-national community** for discipleship, leadership development, and witness
- **Racial reconciliation** and cross-cultural discussions are elevated in a global context as internationals and Americans learn with and from each other
- Attracts internationals who long to **make American friends**
- Americans developed as **global citizens and disciples** as they learn from internationals
- International leaders **grow in confidence** as they lead Americans as foreigners and often English learners, owing to the unique gifts they bring
- Potential of **paternalism is lessened** as internationals and Americans share leadership (vs Americans joining international chapter mainly as leaders/volunteers)

Top Challenges

- Challenge to **meet unique needs** of both Americans and international students (leadership development, discipleship, reentry, etc)
- Added layer of **potential cross-cultural conflict** between Americans and international students
- **Balance of power and representation** between international students and Americans (e.g., potential international leaders may be overlooked due to lack of cultural awareness or opportunity when more American leaders are available/proactive in seeking roles)
- International students learn Western theology and practices that may not be appropriate when they share with family/friends and return to home countries

Helpful Resources & Strategies

- Help international students and Americans [deepen partnership](#)
- Provide ongoing [cross-cultural training](#)
- [Crossing Cultures with Jesus](#), chapters 3-6 & 8 using chapter discussion questions
- [Communicate the gospel appropriately](#) for honor-shame cultures
- Help internationals contextualize the gospel and leadership for their country of origin. See [5 Thresholds for Internationals](#)
- Know the [unique characteristics](#) for major groups
- Help students start or grow an ISM [small group](#)
- Help start an international [discipleship group](#)
- Apply the [international student leadership pathway](#) to your structures

Emerging Multinational Chapter

Americans are the target audience with some internationals present though there's little intentionally in involving them

Examples

- A multiethnic chapter on a small liberal arts campus with some Christian internationals involved without most noticing their unique needs and contributions as international students
- AAM chapter's emphasis on community and food naturally attracts international students from Asia and beyond
- A GFM chapter has several international Christians by default due to a shortage of American leaders
- A community college plant has over 50% internationals since a key international brought her entire network

Top Strengths

- Chapter has qualities that **attract the nations**
- Chapter is **poised** to become a multinational chapter as internationals are already involved
- **Potential for new opportunities** to grow perspective on diversity and racial reconciliation through internationals

Top Challenges

- Limited opportunities for internationals to contribute and lead
- Non-Christian internationals (majority of international population in the U.S.) are likely not reached with this approach
- Internationals' unique needs (e.g., preparing to return to a home country hostile to Christianity) may be overlooked

Helpful Resources & Strategies

- Learn how [ISM encompasses InterVarsity core values](#)
- Do these [mini-Bible studies](#) with your students
- Watch and share [this story](#)
- Integrate a global perspective into your chapter - [pick one or more ideas](#)
- [Explore your campus and chapter](#)

ISM Chapter

International students are the target audience; a few Americans may be involved, usually as leaders/volunteers or unnoticed bystanders.

Examples

ISM Chapters come in various shapes and sizes, with some focusing on sub-groups while others include unexpected populations.

- An undergrad chapter with half undergrad and half grad internationals
- A grad Arts ISM chapter for film students
- A community college plant with 30+ internationals and immigrants
- A chapter with an emphasis on serving Muslims
- An undergrad chapter with ESL program students, exchange students, transfer students, masters students, post-docs, and family members

Top Strengths

- Promotes international student group identity and encourages strong **international student ownership**
- Provides space for **shared experiences** of living in a foreign culture
- Provides more room for **international student-specific discipleship**, leadership development, and reentry preparation
- Attracts international students who are **less assimilated** and/or may be uncomfortable with or intimidated by Americans

Top Challenges

- Insufficient international student leaders, especially in planting
- Potential for segregation or polarization (dominated by one ethnic group)
- Tendency to have staff-centered leadership due to international student population with a) high non-Christian to Christian ratio b) fewer available leaders and potentially fewer missional Christians

Helpful Resources & Strategies

- Participate in New Staff Training for ISM staff
- Understand how [5 Thresholds are different](#) for international students
- Know the [unique characteristics](#) for major groups
- [Communicate the gospel appropriately](#) for honor-shame cultures
- Apply the [international student leadership pathway](#) to your structures