

## ISM MODELS 101: AN OVERVIEW

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to describe **ISM** (International Student Ministry) models of ministry and assist staff and staff directors in understanding and discerning what model(s) may be appropriate for their campus.

International fellowships can be categorized into three main models: **IWC or International Witnessing Community** - *international fellowship with little or no American involvement*, **Integrated chapter** - *internationals and Americans*, **Collaborative chapter** - *partnership of multiple organizations or churches*. (See chart below). Each has its strengths and weaknesses and is suited for different populations and campus contexts.

ISM chapters often don't fit neatly into one category and can have a combination of traits or fall between different categories. It is often beneficial to "borrow" ideas from each category and form your own "**hybrid**". Groups can also **evolve** from one model to another (or back and forth) over time so don't feel tied down to the model you began with, especially if you are planting a new chapter.

### SUMMARY CHART

TYPE	DEFINITION/ DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE	GENERAL STRENGTHS	GENERAL CHALLENGES	BEST SUITED FOR
<b>IWC (Int'l Witnessing Community)</b>	A predominantly international student-led fellowship with a focus on reaching and equipping international students.	U of Houston – Predominantly grads, led by staff, international student leaders and volunteers.  UC Irvine – Different meetings and communities (Christian Bible studies, GIGs, culture nights, cultural discussions etc) catering to different degrees of spiritual interest and backgrounds.	- Encourages strong international ownership and missional mindset.  - Provides room for intentional and specific leadership training, discipleship, and reentry prep for internationals.  - Attractive to internationals who may not be comfortable with Americans.  - Provides space for internationals to encourage each other in the context of a shared experience of living in a foreign culture.	- Tendency to have staff-centered ministry due to: (1) high turnover and low availability of internationals, (2) high non-Christian to Christian ratio, (3) fewer Christian leaders and (potentially fewer) missional Christians and longer time to raise leaders.  - Insufficient number of student leaders, esp. in earlier planting stages.  - Potential for cross-cultural conflict, miscommunication, segregation, or polarization.	<b>Staff:</b> - Extra strong passion to develop international leaders. - Extra patience while planting.  <b>Campus:</b> - Large international student population. - Demographics of longer-term international students (4-year undergrad, grads). - High ratio of less westernized/ assimilated internationals (see assimilation continuum below).

<p><b>Integrated Model</b></p>	<p>A fellowship of American and international students seeking to form one witnessing community with shared ownership, responsibilities, leadership, and vision.</p>	<p>UNLV – Large group made up of “missional small groups”, ISM being the largest missional group.</p> <p>Potsdam-Clarkson NY– Tremendous evangelistic growth after American chapter engaged internationals; developing into an integrated model over several years. Flourishing missional non-English small groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consistent celebration of diversity — a powerful model for multi-cultural community, discipleship and witness; Americans and internationals learn with and from one another.</li> <li>- Americans and internationals trained cross-culturally, equipping them for cross-cultural ministry as future world changers (e.g. the global marketplace, academia, government, ISM staff, missions).</li> <li>- Provides leadership when there are relatively few international Christians. Americans serve as cultural informants and advocates for internationals.</li> <li>- Reaches both Americans and internationals effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Challenge to meet all of the needs (leadership development, discipleship, post-academic transitions, and reentry) of both Americans and internationals.</li> <li>- Potential for miscommunication and conflict increases with diversity.</li> <li>- Requires careful leadership selection of Americans who are experienced or committed to multinational leadership.</li> <li>- Requires intentional empowerment of internationals, and ongoing cross-cultural leadership training for both Americans and internationals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Staff:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vision, passion, and gifts to mobilize both internationals and Americans for ISM.</li> <li>- Desire and resources to disciple/train American students in cross-cultural ministry.</li> <li>- Not enough staff for a separate ISM chapter.</li> </ul> <p><b>Campus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High proportion of short-term internationals (e.g. English learners, exchange students, one year Masters programs).</li> <li>- Low numbers or ratio of internationals to Americans.</li> <li>- Internationals who desire interactions with or seek to become comfortable with Americans and vice versa (i.e. language students, more western influenced background). Higher assimilation (see assimilation continuum below).</li> </ul>
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<b>Collaborative Model</b>	An ongoing collaboration of staff and volunteers from various para-church organizations/churches (ranging from a handful of churches to a city-wide network) to offer a larger number of services and activities.	<p>FOCUS - PSU – Commuter campus; clear plan given to the international student office; staff and associate committed to core values: Bible study, partnership, serving, community, evangelism, disciple making, prayer, equipping and commissioning; unique blend of gifts from different ministries allow each to use its strongest attributes.</p> <p>UNC – Three ministries (two full partners) and local churches; bi-weekly dinners with 90% grads; weekly Bible studies and social events; undergrad Americans trained as leaders; more responsiveness to the Gospel since collaborative began.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential for a significant number and variety of services for internationals and greater numbers reached when resources are pooled.</li> <li>- Synergy of organizations and staff.</li> <li>- A larger staff team allows each staff (or organization) to do what they're best at. Staff gifting emphasized (<u>Strengths Finder</u>, DISC used to assist team dynamics).</li> <li>- A picture of unity in the body can have strong witnessing power to internationals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong trust needs to be built (and sustained) between different partners in order for this model can be fruitful.</li> <li>- Each organization will need to sacrifice some of its own identify/preferences to gain a new collaborative identity, and commit to shared vision and purpose.</li> <li>- Potential conflict with diverse organizational values, ministry approaches, and generational differences.</li> <li>- Sometimes difficult to gather Christian international students (this has recently been addressed at PSU and UNC).</li> <li>- Need for younger staff (in process right now at PSU).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Staff:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Passion to mobilize church volunteers for ISM.</li> <li>- Available partnership of several organizations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Campus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Campus (or city) with limited existing services for international students.</li> <li>- Small campuses or towns with multiple ministries.</li> <li>- Residential campus.</li> <li>- Steadily rising international student numbers.</li> <li>- Little competition for international student attention.</li> <li>- Somewhat cautious international student office.</li> </ul>
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**Discerning your ministry model(s) –**

**Steps** (done in community with your staff team, coach, or supervisor) ~

1. PRAY! Seek God’s direction throughout the whole process.
2. Know yourself - your passion and gifts. Get feedback from others.
3. Know the existing campus - ministry history, situation, context.
4. Assess your resources, potential partnerships, strengths, and challenges.
5. Dream and cast a vision for the campus.
6. Evaluate the different models and choose a model (or a hybrid) and proceed.
7. Evaluate your model and strategies regularly or as situations change.

**Passion:**

- What is your vision for the campus? What do you long to see happen on your campus?
- Is there a particular population that has a special place in your heart? (ex. Muslims, Hindus) or whoever comes across your path?
- What are you most passionate about? Seeing Americans be transformed by ISM? Bridging different people groups? Making disciples that will have enormous impact back home?

**Playing Field: Context -**

- What does the campus already provide for international students? What is lacking?
- What do other ministries (if any) provide for the international population?
- What are the demographics on your campus—what nationality and types of internationals are there?

**Players: Available Resources -**

- How many staff and volunteers are on your team? What does your team bring? Experience? Culturally savvy? Are you equipped to reach more culturally assimilated or separated students?
- Are there qualified American students who can serve? What does your partnership with the American undergrad chapter look like? What potential do you see?
- Are there churches and para-church organizations open or eager to partner?

**References & Resources:**

**Acculturation Continuum** (Adapted from Katie Rawson’s and Julia Thorne’s paper).

**Contact with Host Culture:** ← Less

More →

**Separation**

**Strategic Adaptation**

**Bicultural**

**Assimilation**

**Suitable Models:** Ethnic Fellowship

IWC

Integrated Chapter

**Cultural Assimilation** is an important component that should be taken into consideration as you choose a model. Generally speaking, assimilators will be drawn to groups with more Americans (thus the integrated chapter or American chapters), Bicultural people and strategic adaptors to multicultural IWCs, and separators to ethnic fellowships. Depending on factors such as how attracted to American culture a student is, what type of academic program they’re in, and what previous life experiences and exposure to western culture they have had, they will fall on different parts of the continuum. Students can also move back and forth over their stay in the U.S. (ex. A student becomes more assimilated over time; another student is initially drawn to American culture due to false image of Americans but later withdraws due to a sense of disillusionment).

For more info, see:

**ISM MODELS 102: SELECTING A MODEL FOR PLANTING, TRANSITIONING and BUILDING\_**

**Chapter Planting Appendix for ISM:** <http://www.intervarsity.org/mx/item/7171/> and

**International Witnessing Communities, An Introduction:** <http://www.intervarsity.org/ism/article/1727>