

FIRST STEPS IN REACHING INTERNATIONALS

“**Why are you guys so nice?**” This is one of the comments you will often hear when you meet new international students on campus. First impressions are important for everyone, but especially for international students. This excellent question gives you an opportunity to explain your motivation—the love of Christ. But, of course, not every international is so immediately open and positive. Here are some key steps in beginning a relationship with an international.

1. Prayer

Before you begin a relationship with an international student, be sure to pray. **Ask God to lead you to someone who is seeking** and pray that you would be spiritually sensitive as you listen and observe.

Near a certain campus there is a Japanese pilot training school. One campus minister had been burdened to meet some of the wives of the pilots who are trainers at the school. One day as she was driving to campus, she prayed specifically that she would meet someone that day from the school. As she arrived on campus, she noticed an Asian woman who looked lost. She went up to her and asked if she could help. After giving her directions, she asked the woman where she was from. She said that she was from Japan and that her husband was a pilot trainer at the school! Since then, that relationship has led to friendships with many other pilots’ wives and lots of opportunities for evangelism.

2. Listening

Scripture teaches us to **be quick to listen and slow to speak**. Listening to an international shows that you really care, and it also provides you with helpful insights into the person’s background.

For example, during an English conversation class one student mentioned that when he was young his family stopped going to the mosque. The comment was made in passing, but it was noteworthy. Later, when the Christian worker wanted to transition into a spiritual discussion, they reminded the international student of his comment and asked if he would mind explaining why his family stopped going to the mosque. That led to a fruitful discussion about spiritual

things.

3. Observation

One time during a meeting with a student from Germany, an American noticed that the German's shirt displayed a cross and a German word that looked similar to the English "evangelical." Asked the meaning of his shirt, the German said that the word did not mean the same thing as in English. He added that even though he was not religious, he enjoyed the social activities in his church. This conversation later led to a good discussion of the gospel.

When you meet with students, try to observe what they are wearing or carrying. What is written on their clothes, key chains, backpacks, etc. can lead to fruitful discussions. Also, your comments or questions about such things will communicate your interest in the student.

4. Dialogue

As you already know, most international students want to practice their English. Producing sentences is one of the hardest parts of language learning. If you are meeting a new student, explain that you may ask a lot of questions, so he or she can practice speaking. Ask questions that require at least a sentence or two for an answer. These types of questions will also give you insight into the student's thinking. Here are some examples:

- "What do you find interesting (strange, funny, different) about life here?"
- "How are families here different?"
- "How are studies different?"

Asking your friend to share from his life and family will also teach you much. You can ask:

- "Do you have pictures of your home or family?" "Please tell me about the people or things in the picture..."
- "Where is your hometown (locate it on Google maps)?"
- "What do people in your country think about people here?"
- "What do you like to eat?" "What do you not like to eat?"
- "What do you do in your spare time?"
- "Do you have hobbies?"
- "What activities here are you enjoying the most?" (Does your new friend have contact with others, or is he or she alone most of the time?)

If you are sharing your faith, make sure to ask if the student understands the meaning of

the words you use. For example, don't assume that he or she understands "sin," "faith," "unconditional love," "repentance." Stop and ask if your friend understands such a word and if he or she can explain it back to you. Dialogue keeps them the other person engaged and gives you confidence that your message is getting through.

Finally, **for many of these students, coming to the States is their first encounter with the Body of Christ,** and often its impact is powerful. One student described her initial experience in the U.S. as a "flood of Christianity." She saw so many churches and met so many vital Christians that she wanted to come to a Christian training conference to find out more about the message of Jesus. She comes from a country where fewer than 1% of the people are Christians. Consider the responsibility and the privilege you have to be among the first ambassadors of Christ that these students will encounter. As you demonstrate the love of Jesus-through prayer, listening, observation and dialogue-you can make a major impact for the gospel.