



International Student Ministry

# From Disciples to Partners

*Transforming engagement  
through innovation*

Volume I  
Jan 2026

Frontier Commons Innovation Lab

International Friendships, Inc. | 2026 Strategic Initiative

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## **The Ecosystem**

## **ISM's Catalytic Leaders**

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# → Executive Summary

*A snapshot of the strategic insights, tensions, and innovations in this primer.*

## Frame

A strategic mission field in our backyard and a potential mission force for the nations.

## The Strategic Opportunity

The United States hosts over 1.2 million international students each year, with 75% from restricted or closed-access nations. This represents a historic "mission at our doorstep" opportunity, where the church can engage future global leaders from the 10/40 window without crossing borders.

## The Core Challenge: The "Returnee Gap"

Despite high enrollment, around 80% of international students who become Christian while overseas return home without a sustained faith community or discipleship plan. This attrition represents an opportunity to change the story.

## Hospitality to Movement

This primer outlines a shift from hospitality as a product to a "Global Pipeline" (hospitality as a gateway to movement). We are moving from viewing students as temporary guests to empowering them as "Ambassadors in Exile"—partners who will take the gospel back to their home nations.

## Key Innovations

We are prototyping four solutions to close the gap:

### Digital & Borderless Discipleship

Utilizing digital tools to reach students before they arrive and sustain them after they leave.

### Returnee Re-Entry Pathways

Pre-departure "risk assessment" to prepare students for the spiritual and ethical pressures of home.

### Faith & Work Integration

Discipleship that integrates faith and professional ethics, preparing students to lead in secular industries.

### The "Theory U" Innovation Model

Using Theory U to design a participatory lab.

# Who This is For

## For Staff

### From "Burnout" to "Equipper"

This primer is for staff who feel the weight of continual hospitality that yields little fruit. It offers a way out—a shift from doing all the ministry yourself to becoming a spiritual architect who designs systems for students to lead.

## For Leaders

### An Invitation to Surrender

For ministry directors and board members, this issue is a challenge to surrender control. True multiplication feels risky. It requires trusting the Holy Spirit in the lives of young believers. This primer provides the frameworks to manage that risk without killing the movement.

## For Volunteers

### From "Helper" to "Co-Laborer"

This is for the church member who wants more than just a volunteer slot. It is an invitation to become a true co-laborer—opening your home not just for a meal, but as a long-term spiritual landing pad for future world leaders.

## For Partners

### Strategic Impact

For our donors and prayer partners, this is a roadmap to high-leverage investment. It demonstrates that your support is not just funding a campus club; it is fueling a global pipeline that sends missionaries into closed nations where Western money and personnel cannot go.

# → Editor's Letter

With the turn of the 21st century, there have been significant shifts in the movement of peoples. Now, due to geopolitical tensions, those trends are shifting once again. Even as enrollment numbers fluctuate, the U.S. remains the top destination for international education.

With students moving to new and different countries, the world is becoming ever more globalized. This presents a unique opportunity: international students may well be the key to reaching "closed countries" where access remains tight.

This is the heart behind International Students, Inc. (IFI). We represent a national movement partnering with local churches, universities, and volunteers to provide life-changing hospitality and friendship. We work strategically to make the world feel at home and extend God's love globally—right where we are.

To navigate this changing landscape, we established Frontier Commons, an innovation lab within IFI designed to identify pain points in International Student Ministry (ISM) and find ways to fill the gaps. We are testing unconventional approaches, using iteration and experimentation to discover what works and what doesn't in this new era.

We hope that this primer will serve the community at large—from the staff who serve in ISM to our faithful volunteers. But above all, we pray that we keep our focus on the one. The one student who goes back to their home country and is a catalyst for transformation, carrying the hope they found here to places we could never go.

– Frontier Commons Team

# → How to Read This Primer

## What This is & What This Isn't

This primer is an exploratory tool designed to connect emerging leaders to key issues in global mission. It is not a textbook of settled "best practices," nor does it offer easy answers to the complex social and religious barriers found in frontier contexts. Instead, it is a dynamic collection of perspectives, experiments, and open questions.

## The "Paper Airplane" Philosophy

Innovative strategies in this primer are like paper airplanes:

- **Prototypes:** They are designed to be launched, tested in the real-world campus environment, and adjusted through iterative feedback loops.
- **Agility:** We value rapid testing and learning over perfection.
- **Success Metrics:** Success is not measured by linear Western efficiency, but by faithfulness to God's leading and the health of the relationships formed.

## Invitation to Engage

We invite you to move from being a "hearer" to a "doer."

- **Test:** Take one idea from the "Experiments" section and try it on your campus.
- **Respond:** We need your feedback. Did it work? Did it fail?
- **Collaborate:** Inviting a student into your home for a meal or working alongside international student ministries on a digital project

## Inspiration from Forerunners in ISM

The "ISM's Catalytic Leaders" section highlights people who have helped shape the movement:

- **Historical pioneers** who laid early foundations
- **Current operators** serving and leading today
- **Innovators** exploring what may come next

These profiles show ISM as a living movement, shaped by faithful people doing practical work together over time.

# → Key Terms & Acronyms

- **Diaspora:** People living outside their country of origin. International students are a strategic subset of the global diaspora—highly mobile and influential.
- **Friendship vs. Mentorship:** Friendship builds trust; mentorship adds intentionality for spiritual formation and leadership. Healthy ISM integrates both.
- **Global Pipeline:** The strategic objective of the Innovation Lab, representing a shift from "Service Land" (where hospitality is the final product) to a pipeline that views hospitality as a gateway. The ultimate goal is to move students from being guests to becoming catalysts for movement in their home nations.
- **Implantation:** A mission strategy that focuses on helping the gospel spread naturally, like yeast, through a student's existing oikos (household) or relational network. This is the preferred method, as it avoids the harm of "extraction evangelism," which separates a new believer from their family and culture.
- **International Student Ministry (ISM):** Intentional Christian outreach, hospitality, discipleship, and leadership development among students studying outside their country of origin.
- **Returnee:** A former international student who returns to their home country. They are potential culture-bridging leaders but often face reverse culture shock.
- **Service Land:** A critical term describing a ministry trap where staff focus too heavily on providing practical services (like furniture, airport rides). This focus inadvertently treats international students as "mere consumers" or customers, rather than training them to be cross-bearing disciples.
- **The New People Next Door:** A term used by the Lausanne Movement to describe international students. They are viewed as a divinely orchestrated scattering (diaspora) that brings the world's nations to the church's doorstep, allowing for gospel engagement without having to cross borders.
- **Third Culture Kids (TCKs):** Individuals who grew up among two or more cultures. Their sense of belonging is often global rather than national.

# Innovation & Framework Terms

- **Design Thinking:** A human-centered, non-linear, and iterative process for creative problem-solving and innovation. It involves five phases—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test—to understand users' needs, challenge assumptions, and create innovative solutions.
- **Theory U:** A participatory innovation process that functions as a prototype model. It moves through three distinct phases: seeking understanding (co-sensing), prayerful reflection (presencing), and discerning new ways forward (co-creating) through iterative prototyping.
- **Wicked Problem:** A complex, ill-defined, and multifaceted social, religious, and ethical barriers in frontier and missional contexts that have no simple solutions. The primer is designed to explore these difficult issues through collaborative innovation.



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# Landscape

# → ISM Snapshot

## Key Statistics

### Annual Enrollment

**1.2 M**

International students are hosted annually by the U.S.

### Strategic Origins

**77%**

international students originate from restricted or closed-access nations, where traditional missionary access is limited or illegal.

### Top Sending Nations

**India: 31%**

**China: 23%**

**South Korea: 4%**

### Ministry Engagement

**10%**

are engaged with Christian ministry during their stay.

# Trends

## The "Global Pipeline"

We are shifting from viewing students merely as guests to seeing them as a "Global Pipeline" of future leaders. These students are not accidental arrivals; they are future culture-shapers who will return to influence government, business, and education in their home nations.

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## Digital-First Ministry

We are shifting from viewing students merely as guests to seeing them as a "Global Pipeline" of future leaders. These students are not accidental arrivals; they are future culture-shapers who will return to influence government, business, and education in their home nations.

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## Mental Health Crisis

There is a sharp rise in loneliness, cultural dislocation, and mental health struggles, making "Holistic Hospitality" (emotional, practical, and spiritual care) more critical than ever.

# → Global Lens

## Outside North America

- **Migration as Mission:** The movement of 7 million migrants worldwide is not a geopolitical accident but a sovereign act of God (Acts 17:26–27).
- **International students are a strategic subset** of the global diaspora, enabling local churches to engage with unreached peoples without crossing borders.

## Perspective Shift

- **From "Territorial" to "Diaspora" Missiology:** We are moving from a "geographical" view of missions (sending missionaries there) to a "diaspora" view (engaging people here who will go everywhere).
- **From "Guests" to "Partners":** We must stop viewing international students as passive recipients of our charity and start viewing them as partners in the Great Commission. They possess the language, cultural fluency, and access to closed nations that Western missionaries will never have..



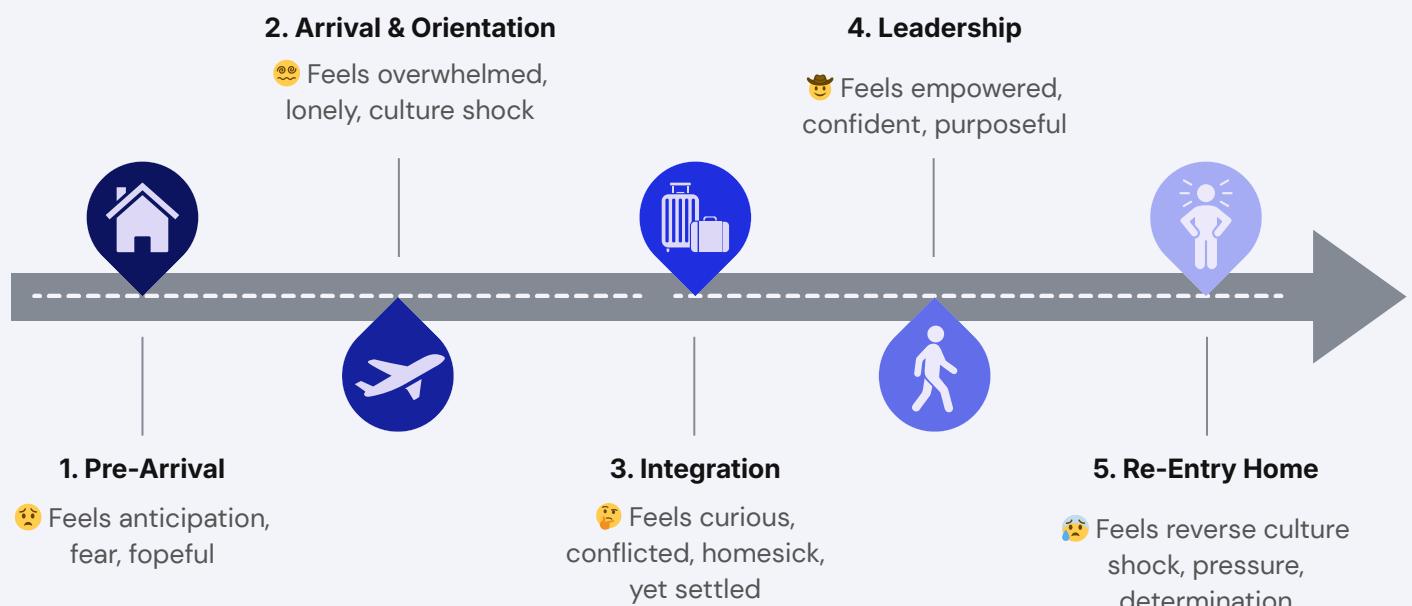
INSIDE THE

# Student Experience

# → The Student Experience

## Mapping the Journey

Instead of viewing international students as static "targets," their experience can be seen as a dynamic, five-stage lifecycle. Each phase represents a unique strategic window for discipleship. By better understanding their journey we can better come alongside them.



<b>1. Pre-Arrival</b>  (Hidden Window)	<p><b>Scenario:</b> Before a student ever steps foot on a U.S. campus, they are already forming expectations, fears, and hopes.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Ministry can begin here by establishing digital touchpoints — social media presence, webinar connections, and peer networks — that build trust before the first handshake.</p>
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## 2. Arrival & Orientation (Vulnerable Phase)

### **Scenario:**

The first 2–4 weeks are significant. Students face immediate culture shock, logistical confusion, and acute social isolation.

### **Opportunity:**

Research confirms that early relational support during this window is the strongest predictor of long-term retention. The strategy here is holistic hospitality — meeting practical needs (furniture, airport rides) not as an end in itself, but as the bridge to relationship.

## 3. Integration (Formation Phase)

### **Scenario:**

Students begin to build rhythms of life, explore faith questions, and navigate their identity between two cultures.

### **Opportunity:**

The approach moves from being a "host" to being a "guide," helping them navigate the deeper questions of belonging and belief. This is where patience and cross-cultural competence are key.

## 4. Leadership (Empowerment Phase)

### **Scenario:**

The view shifts from students as recipients of ministry to equipping them as partners.

### **Opportunity:**

Following the "Daniel Paradigm," the goal is to empower them to lead bible studies, organize outreach, and contextualize the gospel for their own peers.

## **5. Re-Entry Home (Deployment Phase)**

### **Scenario:**

Students returning home face "reverse culture shock," family pressure, and professional ethical challenges.

### **Opportunity:**

Often the most neglected phase, re-entry is not the end of ministry — it is the beginning of multiplication. We could transform "departure" into "deployment," equipping them with a "social safety net" and a strategic plan for their return.

# → Empathy Mapping

Empathy mapping helps us build a shared, deeply empathetic understanding of people by visualizing their behaviors, attitudes, and emotions (say, think, do, feel). It is used to synthesize research, uncover hidden needs, remove bias from designs, and align stakeholders on user-centric goals, ultimately driving better, more targeted solutions.

Empathy mapping is used to ground strategies in the student's reality. Four simple questions are asked to step into their shoes:



We'll give you some examples as food for thought on the next page.

### What are they seeing?

Many witness an excessive wealth of goods in Western churches, leading them to perceive Christianity as a pathway to material improvement rather than spiritual transformation. Missions can feel distant or unfamiliar to their own cultures, and despite years on campus, many students are never welcomed into a local home to experience genuine hospitality.

### What are they hearing?

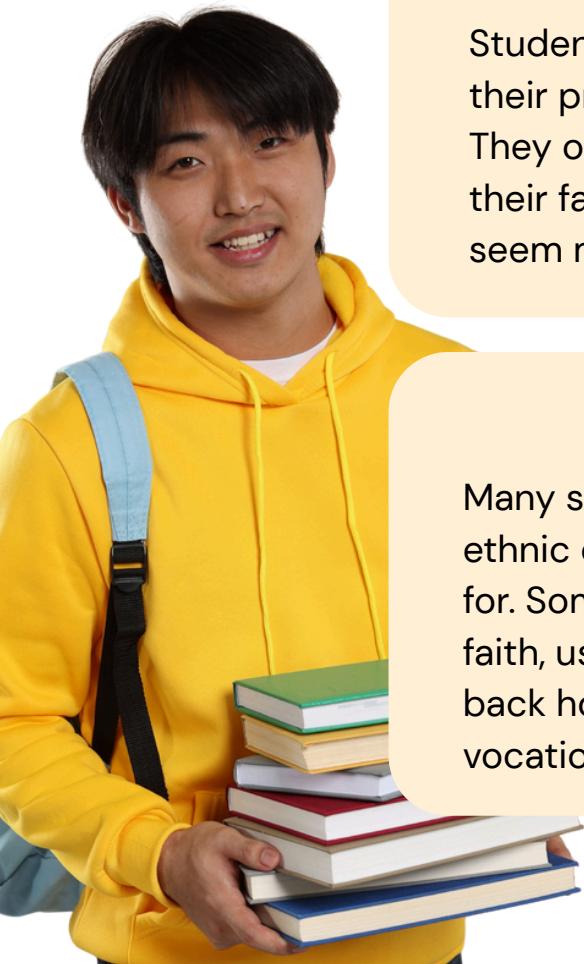
Students become immersed in secular academic narratives and internet consumerism that promises peace through material goods. At the same time, many face warnings from home that frame Christianity as a political threat or a threat to familial honor, along with strong pressure to prioritize career success over faith.

### What are they thinking & feeling?

Students experience deep loneliness and anxiety about their professional future and complex visa requirements. They often fear that following Jesus would bring shame to their families. Some feel their relationship with Christians seem more driven by agendas than genuine friendship.

### What are they saying & doing?

Many students respond to isolation by withdrawing into ethnic communities or engage with ministries to be cared for. Some others may be asking hard questions about faith, using digital tools to share their new faith with family back home, and seeking training to use their future vocations for the Great Commission.



# → Shifting Our Vocabulary

The words used define the world that is built. Shifting our language will shift our thinking. If the language of "service" is used, a charity will be built. If the language of "partnership" is used, a movement will be started. Intentionality is required in shifting vocabulary to align with the vision.

## From "Foreigner" to **"Neighbor"**

Terms that alienate or "other" are rejected. Instead of "foreigners," the Lausanne term: "The New People Next Door" is adopted. This shifts the theological weight from "us vs. them" to a neighborly imperative of love and proximity.

## From "Extraction" to **"Implantation"**

The discussion moves beyond "extracting" individuals from their dark contexts. The focus is on "Implantation"—planting the gospel seed deep within an existing family network (*oikos*) so that it grows indigenously.

## From "Volunteer" to **"Co-Laborer"**

A volunteer helps out for an hour; a co-laborer shares the burden of the mission. Language is used that invites laypeople into deep ownership, not just shallow participation.



LEARNING TO  
**Innovate**

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# → Friction & Failure

Sometimes ministry staff and volunteers have good intentions of helping and discipling students, but what was good intent become an area of friction or failure. However, in our mistakes, there is room to change. See below three areas we've identified as "failures" and how we could pivot from that.

## 1. Transactional Ministry

### The Scenario

Ministries focusing heavily on logistical aid (airport pickups, furniture giveaways, teaching English)

### The Result

This created "Service Land," where "service sidelines evangelism and discipleship."<sup>1</sup>

### The Pivot

Point students to Christ, disciple them to serve, and empower them to lead so that they can be trained to start Disciple Making Movements in their home countries.

"Service Land" has been identified as a primary obstacle to movement momentum. It is the state of ministries becoming "stuck" in the activities of welcoming and serving students, such as airport pickups, helping find furniture, and teaching English, to the point that these services sideline evangelism and discipleship.

*"When ISM is stuck in 'service land,' students become customers or, even worse, mere consumers of our goods."*  
— Christopher Sneller

## 2. Extraction Evangelism <sup>2</sup>

### The Scenario

Pulling a student out of their family or community network to immerse them into a Western church culture.

### The Result

Irreparable harm to the student's family network, causing the family to "inoculate" themselves against Christianity to protect other members.

### The Pivot

Moving toward Implantation, allowing the gospel to spread like yeast inside existing households, rather than extracting them out.

*"We believe that mobilizing international students to launch Disciple Making Movements is strategic. They have language and cultural advantages, and they are part of a generation that is being trained to enter into the international marketplace, which makes them versatile. I don't know if there is a more effective way to do this, but we are convinced that God is giving us an international army to train."*

- Hua Mulan & Glen Egilson

## 3. Teacher-Centered Bible Studies

### The Scenario

Teacher led bible studies where one teacher prepares and shares a lesson.

### The Result

"Expert mentality" took place creating barriers to students being equipped to lead bible studies on their own.<sup>4</sup>

### The Pivot

Discovery Bible Studies allow students to learn together with accountability embedded in the program. ISI's M:28<sup>3</sup> further refines this strategy to effectively produce multiplying groups.

# → Strategies to Innovate

The goal is to move beyond traditional "event-based" ministry. The following initiatives are live experiments testing how to bypass geopolitical barriers and cultural irrelevance.

## 1. Digital & Borderless Discipleship

**Hypothesis:** Technology can bypass physical borders to maintain discipleship continuity for returnees.

**The Experiment:** Leverage apps and VoIP to mentor students after they return to restricted nations (e.g., China, Middle East).

### Tactics:

- **VoIP/Zoom Mentoring:** Continued discipleship for returnees in China.<sup>1</sup>
- **Digital Distribution:** Secure sharing of the Magdalena film links to alumni in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>
- **Contextual Apps:** Developing smartphone apps specifically curated for Hindu devotees of Jesus, moving beyond generic Western content.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Faith & Work Integration

**Hypothesis:** Professional empowerment builds better relationships, opening for outreach and spiritual conversations

**The Experiment:** The "Internship Workshop Project" (IWP)<sup>6</sup> and Praxis Ventures<sup>7</sup>.

### Tactics:

- **Professional Training:** Teaching resume writing and mock interviews.
- **Redeeming Influence:** A pilot to "recruit, reframe, and redeem" the professional trajectory of 1.1 million international students for mission

### 3. Returnee Re-Entry Pathways

**Hypothesis:** Spiritual attrition rates are high upon return home; specialized "reentry" preparation is required.

**The Experiment:** Move from general discipleship to specific preparation for the "cultural reverse shock" of returning to a restricted nation.

#### Resources Tested:

- Think Home<sup>8</sup>, Back Home<sup>9</sup>, and Home Again curricula.<sup>10</sup> Tested on international students around the country over decades.

### 4. The "Theory U" Innovation Model

**Hypothesis:** Traditional linear strategic planning often fails in mission because complex barriers to Jesus lack "go-to answers" or pre-existing best practices.

**The Experiment:** The Winter Launch Lab<sup>11</sup> utilized a participatory model adapted from Theory U — incorporating phases of co-sensing, presencing, and co-creating.

**Goal:** To move from rigid planning to prayerful prototyping, maintaining postures of an open mind, heart, and will to allow the Spirit to reshape ministry paradigms.

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# Ecosystem

# Campus Ministries

Bridges International  
[bridgesinternational.com](http://bridgesinternational.com)



XAi (Chi Alpha Internationals)  
[chialpha.com/XAi](http://chialpha.com/XAi)



International Friendships, Inc. (IFI)  
[ifiusa.org](http://ifiusa.org)



Campus Ambassadors  
[campusambassadors.com](http://campusambassadors.com)

InterFACE Ministries  
[iface.org](http://iface.org)

International Students, Inc. (ISI)  
[isionline.org](http://isionline.org)



ISM Inc. (Ascension Lutheran Church)  
[isminc.org](http://isminc.org)



InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF)  
[intervarsity.org/fm/ism](http://intervarsity.org/fm/ism)

Navigators ISM  
[navigators.org/mission/navigators-international-student-ministry](http://navigators.org/mission/navigators-international-student-ministry)



Reaching Internationals  
[reachinginternationals.com](http://reachinginternationals.com)

Reformed University  
Fellowship-International (RUF-I)  
[ruf.org/about/ruf-international](http://ruf.org/about/ruf-international)



# Global & Diaspora Focused Ministries

Ambassadors for Christ  
[afcinc.org/en-us/home.aspx](http://afcinc.org/en-us/home.aspx)



Every International  
[everyinternational.com](http://everyinternational.com)



Horizons International  
[horizonsinternational.org/diaspora-ministry](http://horizonsinternational.org/diaspora-ministry)



JCFN (Japanese Christian Fellowship Network)  
[jcfn.org](http://jcfn.org)



Wilberforce International Institute  
[www.wilberforceii.org](http://www.wilberforceii.org)



China Outreach Ministries (COM)  
[chinaoutreach.org](http://chinaoutreach.org)



FICA (Fellowship of Indonesian Christians in America)  
[home.fica.org](http://home.fica.org)



IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)  
[ifesworld.org/en/](http://ifesworld.org/en/)

OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship)  
[omf.org/asia/diaspora](http://omf.org/asia/diaspora)



# Partners Outside of the U.S.

Australian Fellowship of  
Evangelical Students-FOCUS  
[afes.org.au/page/focus](http://afes.org.au/page/focus)



Germany (SMD)  
[international.smd.org/en/start/](http://international.smd.org/en/start/)



Friends International  
[friendsinternational.org.uk](http://friendsinternational.org.uk)

International Student  
Ministries Canada (ISMC)  
[ismc.ca](http://ismc.ca)



IFES-Netherlands  
[ifes-ism.nl](http://ifes-ism.nl)

New Zealand (ISM NZ)  
[ismnz.org.nz](http://ismnz.org.nz)



International Student  
Fellowship Korea (ISF)  
[isfkorea.org/hboard3/](http://isfkorea.org/hboard3/)



Overseas Christian  
Fellowship Australia  
[ocfaustralia.org](http://ocfaustralia.org)

Bridges Canada  
[p2c.com/students/internationals](http://p2c.com/students/internationals)



# Networks and Research

**Anglican International Student  
Ministry Network**  
[newwineskins.org/international\\_studentministry](http://newwineskins.org/international_studentministry)



**Institute of International  
Education (Open Doors)**  
[opendoorsdata.org](http://opendoorsdata.org)



**Worldwide International Student  
Ministry Network**  
[lausanne.org/network/international-students](http://lausanne.org/network/international-students)



**Association of Christians Ministering  
among Internationals (ACMI)**  
[acmi-ism.org](http://acmi-ism.org)



**MargNetwork**  
[margnetwork.org](http://margnetwork.org)

# Conferences for ISM / Returnees



**Connect Conference**

[sites.google.com/view/coco26/home](https://sites.google.com/view/coco26/home)

**Equipper Conference**

[sites.google.com/jcfn.org/ec2025youth/home](https://sites.google.com/jcfn.org/ec2025youth/home)



**NGO Go**

[ngogoisi.org](http://ngogoisi.org)

**Vision**

[visionconf.com](https://visionconf.com)

**VISION**



**World-Changers**

[worldchangersconference.org](http://worldchangersconference.org)

ISM's CATALYTIC  
**Leaders**

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# → Leaders Who Shaped ISM

This section is a functional framework that grounds our innovation in a legacy of faithfulness. True breakthrough is not a break from the past; rather, it is "traditioned," not traditional. This means innovation in ISM are built upon the solid, sacrificial work of pioneers who first articulated the vision.

By profiling historical roots, modern architects, organizational leaders and movement mobilizers, this section fosters a collaborative ecosystem. It ensures current practitioners learn from, collaborate with, and extend the work of their predecessors, enabling a true movement-oriented approach.

# → Catalytic Leaders

**C. Stacey Woods**

First General  
Secretary of IFES in  
1947.

**Moses Chow**

Founded  
Ambassadors for  
Christ

**Rich Mendola**

Former CEO of IFI

**Leiton Chinn**

Former president of  
(ACMI)

**See Seng Tan**

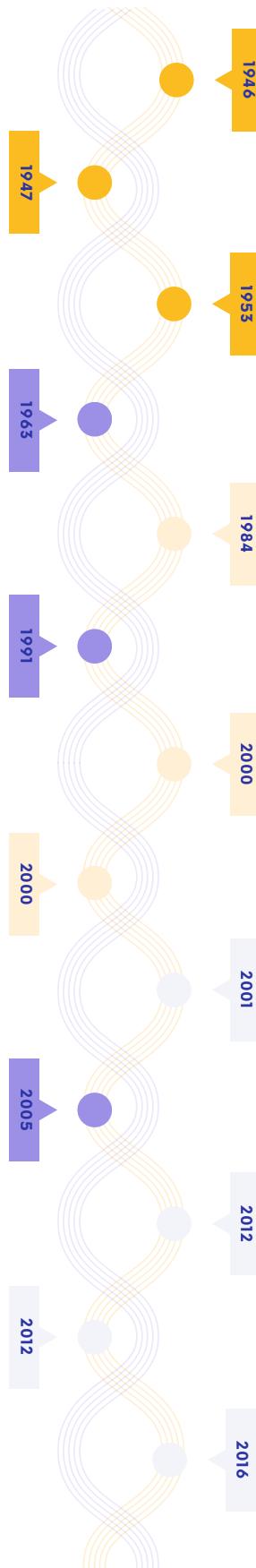
Current President of ISI

**Francina de Pater**

National director of  
IFES Netherlands

**Modern Architects:** Practitioners  
who helped build the field

**Movement Mobilizer:** People  
who are key implementers  
within ISM

**John Mott**

Nobel Peace Prize in  
worldwide Christian  
understanding and peace.

**Robert Finley**

Founded International  
Students, Inc. (ISI) in 1953

**Georges Housney**

Founder of Horizons  
International

**Lisa Chin**

Previous National Director  
of ISM for InterVarsity  
Christian Fellowship USA

**Yaw Attah Edu-Bekoe**

Published book on  
Ghanian diaspora  
missiology

**Yaw Perbi**

Previous President & CEO  
of International Student  
Ministries Canada (ISMC)

**Tom Lin**

President of  
Intervarsity



Organizational Leaders

# ▼ Robert "Bob" Finley (1922–2019)



Robert "Bob" Finley, a key architect of modern International Student Ministry (ISM), founded International Students, Inc. (ISI) in 1953. He pioneered the strategy of targeting international students—future global leaders temporarily on Western campuses—for evangelism and cross-cultural hospitality. Drawing on his experience, Finley created one of the first U.S. organizations exclusively serving this population, shaping ISM practice for decades. He later founded Christian Aid Mission.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Finley's strategy maximized mission effectiveness by empowering local believers and focusing on international students as key movement launchers upon returning home. He emphasized apostolic mobility, biblical fidelity, and cost-effective stewardship, supporting indigenous workers for non-dependent multiplication, foreshadowing later trends in contextualization and partnership.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Apostolic Adventures** — Reflections on faith-driven missionary initiative.
- **Reformation in Foreign Missions** — A critique of Western mission models with proposals for reform.
- **PREM: A Story That Reads As Though It Were Lifted From the Book of Acts** — Narrative accounts emphasizing indigenous, Spirit-led movements.



# ↓ Francina de Pater



Francina de Pater, a long-time leader with IFES's ISM, has played a key role in strengthening Christian witness and discipleship among international students across Europe and beyond.

Rather than functioning as a public-facing thought leader, her catalytic influence has focused on quietly equipping leaders, shaping strategy, and strengthening systems that sustain ISM. Through mentoring practitioners, fostering collaborative learning, and integrating theology with practice, her behind-the-scenes leadership has helped cultivate coherence, depth, and long-term resilience within the global ISM movement.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

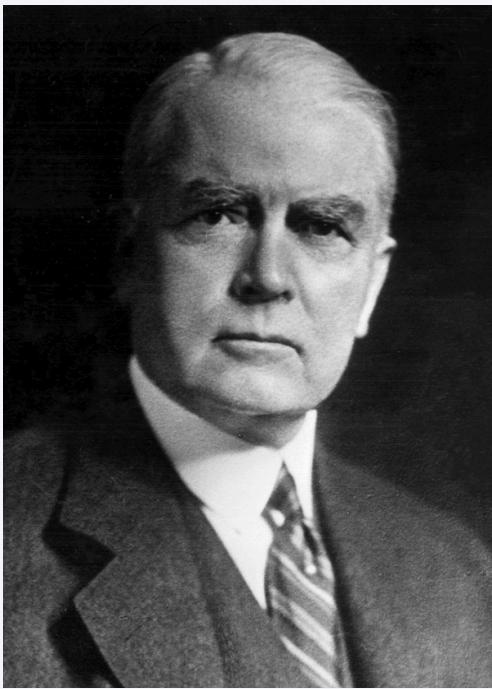
Francina de Pater's approach to ISM is formative, contextual, and practitioner-centered. She emphasizes deep listening, theological reflection, and cultural humility, believing that effective ministry among international students grows from understanding local realities within a global mission framework. She champions contextual discernment, shared learning, and long-term accompaniment. Her work reflects a conviction that healthy ISM is built by investing in people, nurturing reflective practice, and strengthening collaborative networks, allowing ministry to emerge organically rather than through program-driven replication.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Leadership roles with IFES Netherlands** – National Director of International Student Ministry (since 2012)
- International Student Ministry Coordinator, IFES Europe (since 2017)
- **Associate Regional Secretary, IFES Europe & Catalyst for Lausanne WIN** (since 2022)
- **Coaching and counseling practice** – Precious Coaching & Training (trauma & pastoral care)



# ↓ John R. Mott



John R. Mott (1865–1955), a foundational figure in ISM, established the first national U.S. initiative, the Committee on Friendly Relations among Foreign Students, in 1911 to promote cross-cultural Christian fellowship.

His influence on student and missionary movements, including the YMCA and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), shaped Christian global engagement. Mott organized the seminal 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for promoting worldwide Christian understanding and peace.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Mott's ISM blended evangelism with relational bridge-building, believing that a united Christian student witness could foster societal reconciliation and international understanding. He saw ISM as cultivating spiritual partnership and mutual respect among diverse students, combining fervent outreach with cooperation. Mott stressed that prayer, unity, and shared mission were vital for global Christian impact, envisioning students, through networks like the WSCF, as agents of evangelization and peace.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **The Evangelization of the World in This Generation** (1900)
  - Mott's influential missionary vision that became a rallying slogan for global mission engagement. [Internet Archive](#)
- **Strategic Points in the World's Conquest** (key missionary thinking, reflecting strategic outlook on mission work)
- **The Future Leadership of the Church** (leadership insights for Christian movements)
- **The Larger Evangelism** (expanding the scope of missionary outreach).



# ► Leiton Edward Chinn



Leiton Edward Chinn is a key figure in ISM's strategic missional movement. Since the late 1970s, Chinn used historical insight, missiological scholarship, and practical mobilization to elevate ISM's status. He was the first Lausanne Movement Catalyst for ISM, a decade-long role he completed in 2017, increasing ISM awareness within the global missions network. Chinn was also President of the Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals (ACMI), coordinating networking and resources for ministries. His writings helped strategically frame ISM within diaspora missiology and practical church engagement.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Chinn views international students as pivotal participants, not peripheral "cases," in global missions. His strategy frames them as an active, local mission field, connecting engagement to biblical hospitality, missio Dei, and the Great Commission. This encourages churches and agencies to see international students as an existing missional opportunity, not a statistic.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **The Mission Field Coming to Our Campuses —** Lausanne Global Analysis article introducing ISM strategy. [Lausanne Movement](#)
- **International Student Ministry: From 'Blind-Spot' to Vision —** foundational mission paper at Lausanne consultations. [Wikipedia](#)
- **Chapters in Diaspora Missiology —** contributions that frame ISM within diaspora mission scholarship (e.g., in *Global Diasporas and Mission*). [ChinaSource](#)



# ↳ Lisa Espineli Chinn



Lisa Espineli Chinn has architected contemporary ISM, particularly in the area of transition and reentry care. Originally from the Philippines, Chinn first experienced ISM as a participant while earning an MA in Communications at Wheaton College. This experience profoundly influenced her career.

For 14 years, she served as National Director of ISM for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, where she expanded beyond hospitality and evangelism to encompass long-term discipleship, cultural intelligence, and returnee care. She established reentry as a missiologically significant season, not just an afterthought in global Christian formation.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Chinn's core ISM contribution is framing reentry as spiritual formation. She emphasized that going home is often more disorienting than going abroad, and poorly managed reentry can lead to loss, isolation, or disengagement from faith. Her approach integrates cross-cultural training, biblical reflection, and practical tools, helping returnees process grief, redefine identity, and discern calling. Chinn saw transition not as a problem, but as a formative space where God reshapes worldview, vocation, and belonging. This perspective fundamentally changed how ISM prepares students not just for arrival, but for return.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- ***Think Home*** – A workbook guiding Christian international students through theological and emotional reentry reflection.
- ***Back Home*** – A 30-day devotional addressing the early stages of return and readjustment.
- ***Coming to America / Returning to Your Home Country*** – Practical resources for entry and reentry preparation.
- ***Customs and Culture*** – An experiential reentry simulation game used widely in cross-cultural training contexts.



# ↙ Moses Chow



Moses C. Chow was a pioneering leader in ISM, particularly among Chinese students and scholars studying overseas. Born in China, Chow's early pastoral and missionary service across Asia shaped his vision for reaching the Chinese diaspora. In 1963, he co-founded Ambassadors for Christ Inc. (AFC), after seeing the strategic openness of international students in North America. Beginning in 1969, he served as Executive Director, expanding the ministry beyond hospitality to include intentional discipleship, leadership formation, and mission mobilization. His establishment of the Chinese Mission Convention (CMC) mobilized generations into world missions.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Rev. Chow's ministry focused on holistic engagement of international students, viewing them not just as evangelism targets but as agents of world mission. He believed that nurtured Chinese and Asian students were uniquely positioned to become disciple-makers globally. His method combined personal hospitality, contextual discipleship, and leadership training, prioritizing relational campus outreach and equipping students for global impact.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Ambassadors for Christ** – Campus ministry equipping international students for discipleship and mission.
- **Chinese Mission Convention** – Missions conference mobilizing students and professionals globally.
- **Campus Discipleship Training** – Bible studies forming student leaders cross-culturally.
- **Let My People Go** – Testimony inspiring mission commitment.



# Rich Mendola



Rich Mendola significantly shaped ISM by fostering a movement that views international students as strategic mission partners, not just hospitality recipients. His legacy is seen in ISM's integration of evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development, focusing on long-term spiritual investment and cross-cultural humility. Mendola mentored leaders, strengthened networks, and championed the idea that international students are uniquely positioned to share the gospel across borders, shifting ISM toward long-term global impact through globally minded disciples.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

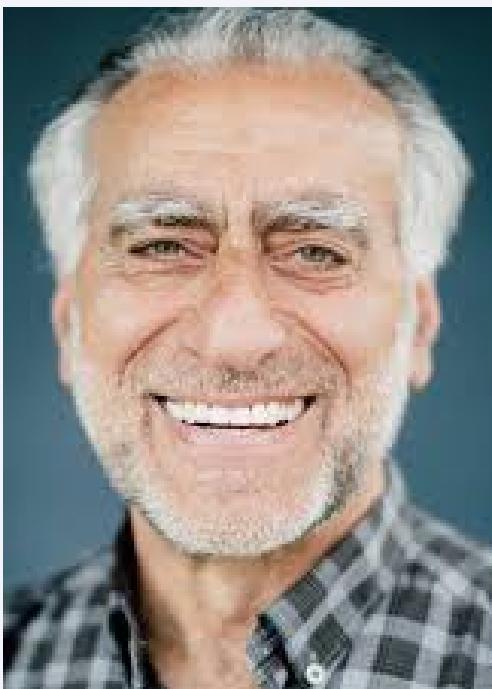
Rich Mendola prioritized intentional relationships over transactional ministry, believing international students are best reached through genuine friendship, patient listening, and contextualized discipleship, not programs. His approach focused on walking alongside students through life transitions (cultural adjustment, academic pressure, identity formation), allowing spiritual conversations to emerge naturally. Crucially, Mendola emphasized multiplication: equipping students to grow in faith and become ambassadors of Christ to their families, professions, and nations.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Leadership and mentoring** within national and regional International Student Ministry networks
- **Development of discipleship frameworks** focused on global multiplication
- **Advocacy** for relational, incarnational ministry models in cross-cultural contexts
- **Strategic investment in training** emerging ISM leaders for long-term impact



# ↓ Georges Houssney



Georges Houssney, founder of Horizons International, is a mission strategist known for reshaping the Church's engagement with the Muslim world. He emphasizes the strategic importance of Muslim-background ISM in Western nations, viewing them as future influencers and bridge-builders to unreached regions, not just ministry recipients. Houssney integrates missiology, geopolitics, and spiritual discernment, challenging ministries to move beyond hospitality to intentional discipleship and leadership development. His work equips ISM practitioners by clarifying Islam as a worldview shaped by honor, power, and allegiance, impacting how they approach security, calling, and long-term gospel impact in restricted areas.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Houssney approaches ISM as strategic stewardship, believing God brings future leaders from closed to open nations for a redemptive purpose. He stresses the need for ministries to combine discernment, spiritual authority, and courageous engagement, pairing love and compassion with truth and clarity, especially when engaging Muslim students who will return to sensitive contexts.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Horizons International** – Founder and President; global research and training organization focused on Islam and world mission
- **The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel** – Influential book exploring theology, prophecy, and geopolitics
- **Islamic Antichrist Theory** – Widely discussed theological framework shaping evangelical engagement with Islam
- **Global Briefings & Training Seminars** – Equipping churches, mission agencies, and ISM leaders worldwide



# ▼ See Seng Tan



Dr. See Seng Tan, leads International Students, Inc. (ISI), bridging rigorous international relations scholarship with gospel-centered service to international students. A native of Singapore and former international student, he joined ISI in 1999 at Arizona State University. After nearly two decades in academia, specializing in political science and security studies (including ongoing roles at RSIS, Singapore), Tan returned to ISI leadership in 2019. His background strengthens ISI's credibility in faith and global affairs, reflecting his conviction that international students are future leaders with lasting global impact.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Tan's approach to ISM integrates theological humility, ethical responsibility, and global realism. Drawing on his scholarship, he advocates for a respectful, culturally complex hospitality faithful to Christian witness. He views ISM not as one-way outreach, but as a mutual, relational, and formative encounter that equips both international students and local churches for faithful presence globally. His patient, dialogical posture, shaped by engagement with pluralism and uncertainty, has helped ISI develop ministry that is intellectually credible, globally relevant, and spiritually grounded.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Awaiting the Impossible** — A philosophical-theological exploration of Derrida, deconstruction, and messianic hope.
- **The Responsibility to Provide in Southeast Asia** — An ethical framework for regional responsibility.
- **The Legal Authority of ASEAN as a Security Institution** (co-authored).
- **The European Union's Security Relations with Asian Partners** (co-editor).



## ↓ C. Stacey Woods



C. Stacey Woods, an Australian-born, globally-minded architect of modern evangelical campus ministry, was pivotal in ISM. He led InterVarsity in Canada, then expanded InterVarsity into the U.S., helping launch the first U.S. chapter at the University of Michigan in the late 1930s, establishing a student-led model. His influence grew dramatically as the first General Secretary of IFES in 1947. He fostered collaboration among national student movements, integrating faith, scholarship, and global missions. His leadership normalized the view that international students were strategic partners and future global leaders.

### Key Philosophy / Approach

Woods championed the "evangelical rediscovery of the university," seeing it as central to shaping culture and global Christianity, not a peripheral mission field. His approach, influencing InterVarsity and IFES, emphasized:

- Local student leadership that is culturally rooted
- Christian faith must engage intellectually with academic life.
- Ministry should equip international students for leadership in their home contexts, not just assimilation.

### Primary Works and Initiatives

- **The Growth of a Work of God** (1978) — Woods' own historical reflection on the development of InterVarsity/USA.
- **Foundational leadership of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA** (late 1930s–1940s).
- **First General Secretary of IFES** (from 1947)
- **Featured subject** in C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University by A. Donald MacLeod.
- **Key figure in For Christ and the University** by Keith & Gladys Hunt.



## Tom Lin



Tom Lin is the eighth President and CEO of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA. Appointed in August 2016, he is the first person of color to lead the national organization, marking a significant cultural transition. Lin's leadership is informed by decades of InterVarsity service, including roles as VP of Missions, Director of the Urbana Student Missions Conference, and earlier work helping establish a student movement in Mongolia. InterVarsity is a founding member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), which is active globally.

### Key Philosophy / Approach

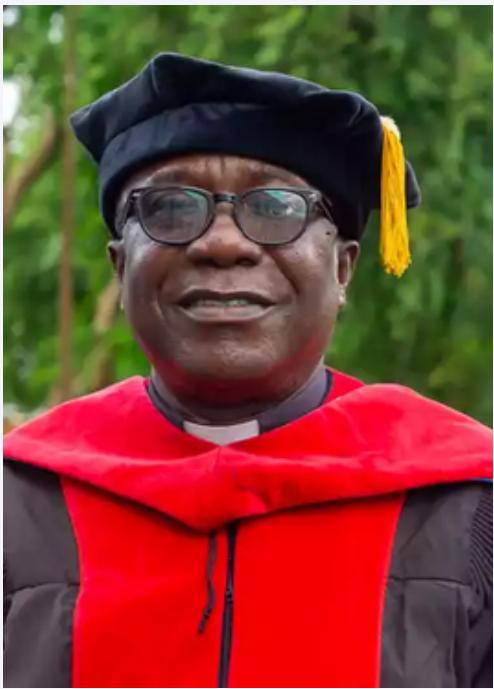
Lin's integrative approach to ISM emphasizes whole-life discipleship, missional formation, and cultural humility, preparing students to follow Jesus across diverse global contexts. Under his leadership, InterVarsity redefined international students as strategic partners and future global Christian leaders, moving beyond a view of them as mere ministry recipients. Lin consistently connects reconciliation, evangelism, and mission, advocating for ministries to address cultural differences with grace and truth, reflecting his belief in God's global mission and the campus's role in shaping globally minded disciples.

### Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Pursuing God's Call** (InterVarsity Press, 2012)
- **Losing Face & Finding Grace** (InterVarsity Press, 1996)
- **Urbana Onward book series** (2012), co-editor
- **Still Evangelical** (2018), contributor
- **Uncommon Ground** (2020), contributor



# ► Yaw Attah Edu-Bekoe



Dr. Yaw Attah Edu-Bekoe, a Ghanaian theologian and Presbyterian minister, is an emerging voice in diaspora missiology. His scholarship offers critical insight for ISM by examining how African Christians live out their faith in multicultural contexts, using Ghanaian diaspora congregations in the U.S. as a case study. Edu-Bekoe reframes migration not as a loss, but as a missional opportunity inherent in global mobility, making his work highly relevant to understanding faith, identity, and mission among internationally mobile populations, including students.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Edu-Bekoe positions diaspora communities as active agents of mission, not passive recipients, advocating for "mission from below" rooted in lived experience and adaptive ecclesiology. For ISM, this shifts the focus from perceived deficits in international students to their theological resources and leadership capacity. His work promotes mutuality over assimilation, seeing international students and diaspora believers as co-laborers in global mission.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- **Scattered Africans Keep Coming** (with Enoch Wan) – An ethnographic and missiological analysis of Ghanaian diaspora congregations in the U.S.
- **Ghanaian diaspora: a missiological study of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregations in the United States of America**
- **Mission-drain or Mission-gain?** – On contemporary mission, evangelism, and discipleship in African domestic and diaspora contexts.
- **Conference presentation: Brain Drain or Gain? Theological and Socio-Economic Analysis of African Diaspora and Missiology in the 21st Century.**



# ↓ Yaw Perbi



Dr. Yaw Perbi is a Ghanaian physician, pastor, and global leadership consultant, known as a key voice in contemporary ISM. He served eight years as President & CEO of International Student Ministries Canada (ISMC), leading a national movement of over 100 staff and 500 volunteers. Under his leadership, ISMC strengthened its missional clarity and global influence. Beyond ISM, Dr. Perbi is the Founder and Global CEO of The HuD Group, a human-development NGO working across 20–25 countries. His work connects faith, leadership, and societal transformation, viewing international students as strategic global leaders.

## Key Philosophy / Approach

Perbi shifted ISM from an institution-centered focus to worldview transformation and global leadership development. He challenged Western mission paradigms, arguing that globalization and the rise of the Global South necessitate reimagining ministry. He saw international students as a "window" into nations' future — culturally formative and globally connected. His approach emphasized holistic discipleship, identity, and leadership capacity, urging practitioners to think systemically, develop cross-cultural intelligence, and engage students as mission co-creators.

## Primary Works and Initiatives

- ***Thinking Outside the Window*** – A memoir-manifesto urging a fundamental rethink of mission and global engagement.
- ***Africa to the Rest*** – A case for Africa's renewed role as a mission and leadership force.
- ***YouthPower!*** – Leadership development for emerging generations.
- ***Financial Whizzdom*** – Integrating financial literacy with personal growth.
- ***The HuD Group*** – A global platform advancing human development, leadership, and societal transformation.



WHAT'S  
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# → Recommended Resources

## I. Books

- Paradigm Shift: Why International Students Are so Strategic to Global Missions, by Jack D. Burke
- Diaspora Missions to International Students, by Enoch Wan
- I'd Like You to Meet My Neighbor, by David Freeland Case
- The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures, by Jayson Georges
- Parties With Purpose: Facilitating Strategic Cross-Cultural Events, by Paula Parker
- Faces in the Crowd: Reaching Your International Neighbor for Christ, by Donna Thomas
- Reaching the World Next Door: How to Spend the Gospel in the Midst of Many Cultures, by Thom and Marcia Hopler
- The World at Your Door: Reaching International Students in Your Home, Church, and School, by Tom Phillips, W. Terry Whalin, and Bob Norsworthy
- The World at Your Doorstep: A Handbook for International Student Ministry, by Lawson Lau

## II. Ministry Guides & Booklets

- Coming to America / Returning to Your Home Country (InterVarsity Store)
- Reaching Internationals Resources (The Traveling Team)

## III. Websites & Organizations

- Look at the Fields (European ISM Network & Resources) – [lookatthefields.org](http://lookatthefields.org)
- Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM) – [cocm.org.uk](http://cocm.org.uk)
- OMF Diaspora Returnee Ministries – [omf.org/east-asia/returnees/](http://omf.org/east-asia/returnees/)
- Operation World (Global Prayer Resource) – [operationworld.org](http://operationworld.org)
- Bethinking.org (UCCF Apologetics & Worldview Resources) – [bethinking.org](http://bethinking.org)
- InterVarsity Store, International Student Ministry – [store.intervarsity.org/international-students/](http://store.intervarsity.org/international-students/)

# → Citations

## Learning to Innovate

1. Christopher Sneller the National Field Director for Bridges International, Article in Frontier Ventures Magazine: "*Getting Unstuck from Service Land: From Service-Oriented Ministries to Disciple-Making Movements*"
2. Rebecca Lewis in the November/December 2018 issue of Mission Frontiers, specifically the articles "*The Remaining Peoples with No Chance to Hear about Jesus*" and "*How to Reach Frontier Peoples: Following Paul's Principles.*"
3. "The M:28 Strategy" by Derrah Jackson, published in the July/August 2016 issue of Mission Frontiers (Vol. 38, No. 4)"
4. Author: Rich Mendola. Source: "*Discovery Bible Study: Equipping International Students to Share Biblical Truth Around the Globe*"
5. Source: Mission Frontiers: "In order for the potential of impacting nations through returning internationals to be realized, we need to move away from the teacher-centered approaches that have been a staple of international student Bible studies for many years. Studies that emphasize that internationals correctly understanding the Word of God and the person of Christ can be helpful in evangelism, but are not effective in raising up internationals who are confident and capable of engaging others in the Word of God."
6. Author: Steven Spicer. Source: "Social Innovation in Frontier Mission: Discerning New Ways Forward," International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM) 37, no. 2 (2020): 72
7. Authors: Andrew Feng, Mike Hillyard, and Zoe Li. Source: Executive Report: Chinese International Students Internship Workshop Project (March 2019).
8. Author: Andrew Feng. Source: International Students Ministry: Praxis Presentation
9. Chinn, Lisa Espineli. Think Home: A Reentry Guide for Christian International Students. Madison, WI: International Student Ministry, InterVarsity/USA, 2011
10. Chinn, Lisa Espineli. Back Home: Daily Reflections on Reentry for Those Who Lived and Studied Abroad. Madison, WI: International Student Ministry, InterVarsity/USA, 2011
11. Mirza, Nate. Home Again: Preparing International Students to Serve Christ in Their Home Countries. Colorado Springs, CO: Dawson Media, 2005.
12. Author: Steven Spicer. Source Title: "Social Innovation in Frontier Mission: Discerning New Ways Forward". Journal: International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM). Volume/Issue: 37:2. Date: 2020.
13. Authors: Wichit Maneevone, Miriam Maneevone, and Anjuli Paschall. Article Title: "The Sounds of Love and Global Transformation: Forty Years of Reaching International Students: "These are students who already have passports, instant access into their home countries, speak the language and know the culture are leaders in their communities. They have already established relationships and have automatic influence to reach the lost in their home countries. Some of the work that takes foreign missionaries years to accomplish is instant for an international student returning home."

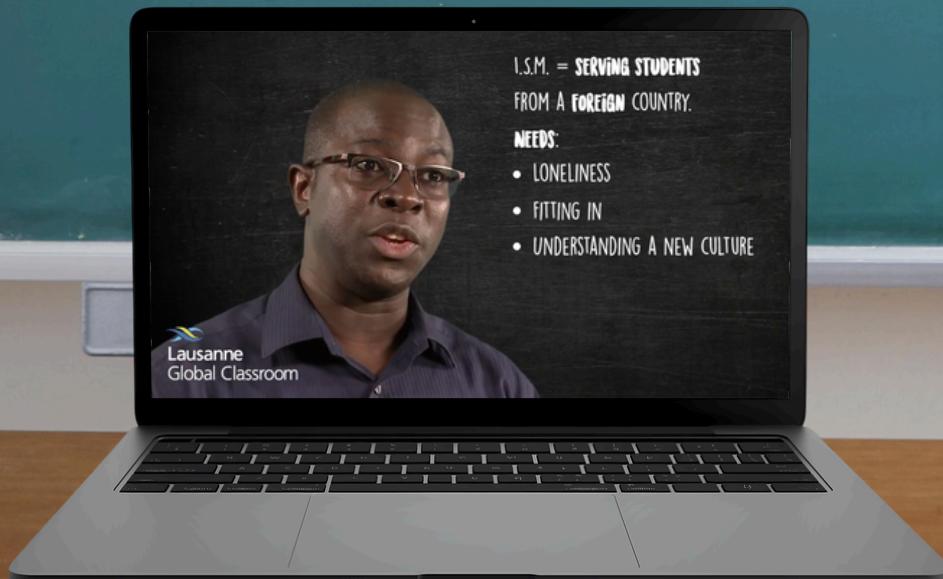


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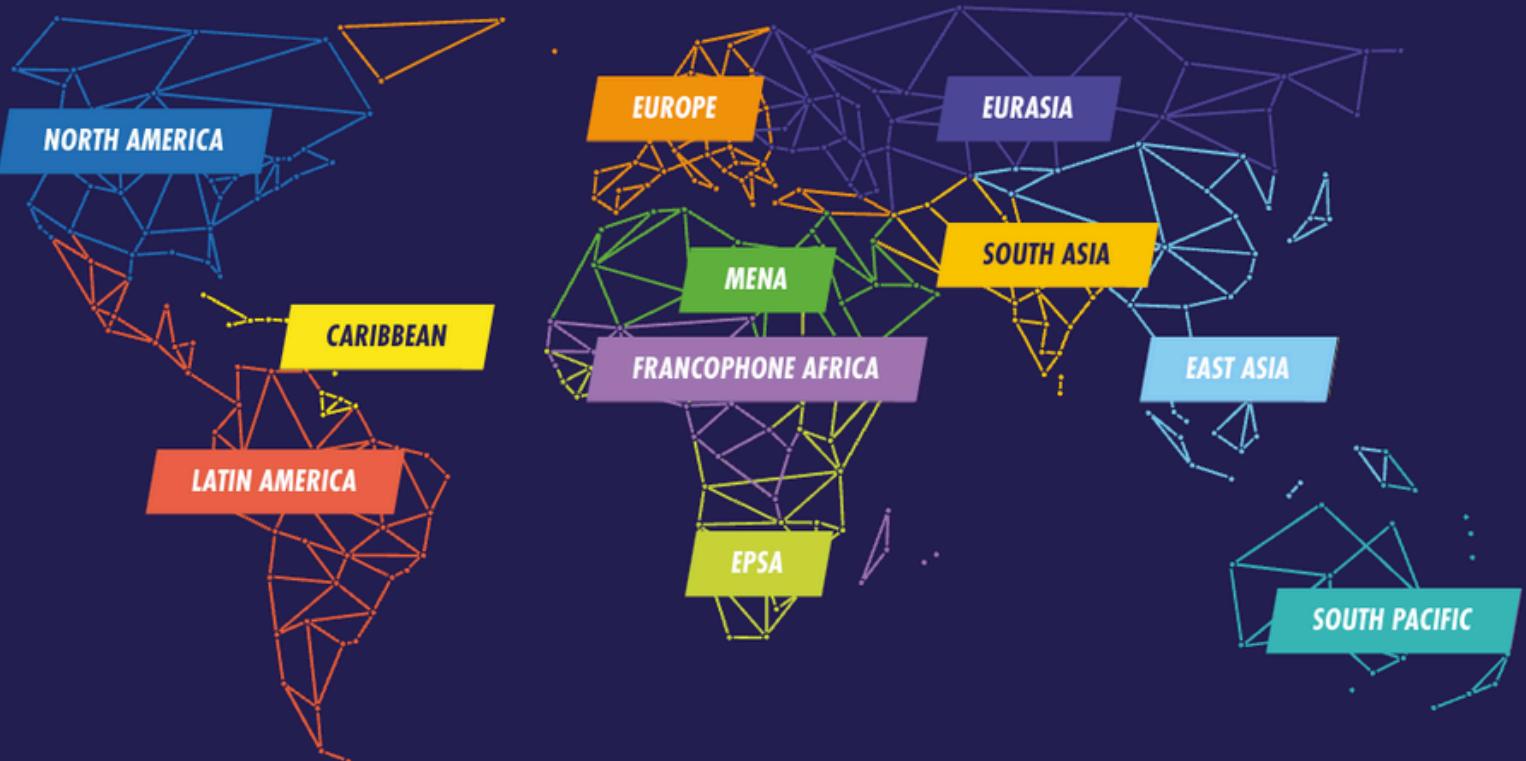


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