

The ISI Approach to Ministry with International Students

International Students, Inc. (ISI) has a national Code of Ethics for working on campus. All staff and volunteers need to be aware of our concern here and agree to our approach and ethical standards. We desire to have a respectful and cooperative relationship with the International Student Advisor's office on campus. Supporting the International Student Advisor and even volunteering your services to assist him or her can help bridge the gaps of misunderstanding.

We must respect internationals and never pressure them. Be aware that internationals may not indicate directly to us that they have felt pressured; they may say it by never coming back to us. Below is a good list of guidelines adapted from material presented by Dr. Jack D. Burke, NAFSA Christian SIG Regional Coordinator (and former Director of International Students and Scholars Services at the University of Houston):

- Treat international students with dignity and respect, not as museum pieces or objects to be converted.
- Focus first on physical and emotional needs of students. Spiritual needs may not surface until mutual trust and respect are established.
- Students appreciate seeing the sights of the area and being invited to cultural events by Americans. Be cautious about inviting students only to church or other religious activities. Some students say "yes" to these invitations just to be polite. (Naturally, invitations to Christian internationals to attend church and Bible studies are very appropriate.)
- When inviting international students to any kind of Christian meeting or activity, be sure your invitation includes the name of the sponsoring organization and an explanation of the nature and purpose of the activity. No surprises!
- Do not pressure international students about becoming Christians. Internationals are often "turned off" by such encounters. Whatever religion they follow, internationals may be equally devout and may resent these obvious attempts to convert them. Even if they are not religious, you may be perceived as attacking their culture. Such attempts are usually counter-productive and will only serve to damage your and ISI's image and rapport with international students. It is best for religious discussions with internationals to grow out of natural situations.
- Be aware of and respond to the spiritual needs of Christian international students. Living thousands of miles away from home, they need the prayer support and fellowship of the Christian community.
- There is no substitute for tangible expressions of love and caring concern.
- Tread sensitively on issues where political or religious differences exist. Being critical of another's ideologies, either explicitly or implicitly, is not conducive to good relationships or to a loving witness.
- Be a good listener to your international friends. We have much to learn. Besides, religious values are often caught, not just taught. Thus our approach is friendship evangelism, "earning the right to be heard." And always remember 1 Peter 3:15: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."*