

Using Short Term Mission Trips as A Campus Strategy

By Robert Rueda, BSM Director, UTRGV

When I first arrived at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with the goal of reaching the campus for Christ, I realized that it was not going to be easy. Our collegiate ministry lacked students and the few that were coming to our events had no idea what a ministry like ours was all about. We lacked vision, students that knew and were passionate about our mission, and organizational DNA that could be transferred to new students as they joined.

I tried for several months to teach Bible studies about evangelism, scheduled outreach events, trained students on how to share the Gospel, and preached a fair amount of messages about the reason our ministry existed. I still felt a sense that students were not fully grasping the calling we had as a collegiate ministry to reach our campus for Christ. We needed a boost, something that would help us tip the scale and turn students into missionaries to their peers. We decided to use short term mission trips as our strategy to reach the campus. The goal: identify students that have shown interest in the goals of our ministry, form them into a team, send them on a short-term mission trip, and help them process their experience and shape it into a strategy to reach the campus. Amazingly, it worked, and this was the beginning of an evangelistic movement in our campus that sees dozens of students come to Christ each semester and that are mobilized to reach their campus and the world for Christ. Here is a breakdown on how we use short term mission trips as our overall strategy.

Identity Students and Form Them into A team

It is important to cast a wide net in campus ministry to reach students. However, it is not the wide net that will reach the campus, it is the students we identify as those that are receptive to God's calling and to the vision of reaching their peers. Focus a lot of energy and resources into these students. Model for them what living out evangelism looks like and plant a seed in their hearts for going on a short-term mission trip. At first when we were starting, we even had funds available to help students go on these trips that came out of our evangelism budget. It was that important to us to lay a good foundation for our strategy to reach the campus.

Send Them on A Short-Term Mission Trip

We select the place they will be serving based on two things: will they be sharing Christ with other people and are the local leaders willing to invest in teaching our students daily. Short-term mission trips are great training opportunities for our students. It is our goal that our students share but most importantly that they learn what it looks like to live a life of evangelism from missionaries who are living that way.

We ask local leaders to teach them about calling, living out their call, and using life skills, creativity, and passion to reach an entire city and how that can be applied to the campus.

Help Them Process Their Experience and Shape It into a Strategy to Reach the Campus

Brenda Sanders, the Director of Go Now Missions, our program to help train and send college students missionaries all over the world always emphasizes the importance of helping students process their missionary experience. There is a method behind this, we want students transformed by their experience into lifelong missionaries wherever they go and to become the

strongest advocates for missions the local church can have. This can only happen if they process their experience. How is God working in other areas of the world? How is God working in your area? How did you experience God using your life to share the Gospel with other people? How can you incorporate what you did and what you learned into your daily life as a college student and beyond? The answers to these questions are powerful statements that can transform a campus ministry into an evangelistic hub that can change the world.

Short-term mission trips teach students flexibility and creativity. They also expose students to rejection and acceptance; to strategies that work and those that do not. These are lessons they need to know to reach the campus for Christ. Short-term mission trips are our way to identify and develop leaders and create an evangelistic movement. If you would like to have a strategy that creates leaders that multiply and that know how to use all resources available, teach them about missions early on. Missions is not only the end result of a campus strategy, it could also be a powerful training tool for a campus ministry every step of the way.