

SEASONS OF MINISTRY

a worksheet to sharpen your thinking
about each season of ministry

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Farmers don't toil the ground week after week just because they're "supposed" to. Everything they do has a specific goal in mind: **producing a harvest**.

Likewise, campus ministry will feel like an aimless activity if you don't have the correct goal in mind: **producing students who are lifelong disciple-makers!** All of our activities should contribute towards that aim.

During a "normal week," you have a daily schedule that, ideally, is full of events and high-value activities like evangelism and disciple-making. But these normal weeks are punctuated by **strategic** and **catalytic** events that mark the transitions in seasons.

Your plan may look somewhat different from this overview. It's not meant to be a rigid guide you must follow. But use this worksheet to **sharpen your thinking** about each season of ministry. Understanding seasons makes planning easier. Each six to eight-week period has a specific goal.

Every season has a purpose!

Seasons of Ministry

SEASON 1: First 6 Weeks

FALL RETREAT: Strategy and Goals

SEASON 2: Mid Semester to December

OFF-SEASON 1: Winter

SEASON 3: January to Spring Break

SEASON 4: Spring Break to Finals

OFF-SEASON 2: Summer

SEASON 1: First 6 Weeks

Season one is a narrow three to five weeks window where new students will attend LOTS of stuff. They'll try out various groups, then decide on the few they will be involved with.

GOAL: It's all about contacts and personal connections. THESE WEEKS ARE CRITICAL.

- If your **annual goal** is to connect with 2,000 students, aim for at least **1,000-1,250 of them now**.
- More than **50%** of the contacts you make all year **will happen in these five weeks**. If not, you're behind!

Planning for Success

The first two weeks of this season should have a lot of attractational events, ie: parties, fun, soicals, hangouts and food events. **Plan ambitiously** to spend a good portion of your program budget, and make as many waves as possible. A slice of pizza may be the first step in a transformed life. Remember the aim is to connect with **NEW** students rather than fellowship with returning students. **Students are looking more for friends** than for a friendly group, **looking for a place to belong** more than activities to attend. Be highly personal, doing as many highly social outreach events in the first two weeks as you can. Some don't have to cost much or any money, but have LOTS of places for people to connect.

Make a **BIG DEAL** of the kickoff of your weekly worship service. Offer free food. Do it on campus in a highly visible location, if at all possible. **Publicize like crazy!** Make it the #1 thing you want everyone to attend.

Need help thinking bigger? Listen to Paul Worcester's talk, *Give Me Freshmen or Give Me Death* found on the Via Students podcast page.

It's ALL about the contacts!

At every event and campus outreach table, GET PEOPLE'S PHONE NUMBER AND FOLLOW. UP. WITH. EVERY. ONE. The following are insights, tips and tricks for student follow-up:

- Freshmen may be more open to spiritual things now than during high school and will fill out almost any survey during the first couple of weeks.
- Take advantage of this limited window of openness!
- A great follow-up strategy is the tool, Gospel-Appointments. You can find it on the Via Students website.

- During the first few weeks, these appointments should take up a huge portion of your energy and your student leaders' energy.
- You will see the most **evangelistic fruit during this time** if you share the gospel personally and invite a response.
- Share and ask for a gospel response at Gospel Appointments and your weekly worship service.
- If your ministry does a lot of cold-contact evangelism during the semester, it will be better to do less contact evangelism during the first few weeks and focus on more personal connections and Gospel Appointments.
- During season one, you are building up towards a catalytic event, ideally a road trip like a great fall retreat.
 - WHY? If they take a road trip with you, they will most likely join your group. **“If a freshman goes on Fall Retreat, we’ll have them for four years.”**
 - Before the trip, they say, “I go to that ministry.” After the trip, they say, “I’m part of that ministry.”
 - THEN you can train and disciple them for the rest of their time in college! They can become Luke 10:2 workers for the harvest.
 - During the retreat, onboard them to your culture and values. **Share the importance** of discipleship, evangelism, and missions.
- All of your events before the fall retreat should enthusiastically promote the fall retreat.
- **DON'T FORGET:** Literally EVERYTHING for the first five weeks can be planned before school starts: weekly calendar, speakers, curriculum, materials and supplies, planning events, scheduling lunches, outlining sermons, and ordering printing.

Questions to ask leading up to this season:

- How are we going to get contact info from new students?
- Are my student leaders trained and equipped to do follow-up with new students?
- What events to we already do? What can we do to use them to connect with more students?

FALL RETREAT: Strategy and Goals

The ideal time is five or six weeks into the semester. Do it too early, and freshmen aren't yet comfortable enough to attend. Do it too late, and studies keep students from attending.

GOAL: New students go from “I attend that ministry” to “That is MY campus ministry.”

- Focus on getting high attendance levels—especially among new students—not on having a perfect program. They'll have a blast just being together!

- **Focus on relationships** and a great experience, not heavy Bible content.
- Get a guest speaker so you can focus on relationships and meeting with students. You can still MC, lead prayer times, share your ministry's values and vision, etc.

Questions to ask leading up to this season:

- What are some ways to can make sure the maximum number of students come?
- Are my student leaders expected to come? How can I cast vision for them to be our best recruiters?
- Who are people in my network I can ask to come do food, music, logistics, speaking, etc?

SEASON 2: Mid Semester to December

This is the time to start discussing summer mission opportunities and discipleship projects. Your sharpest students are already applying for summer internships and jobs. Start challenging students to pray about how they'll spend their summer in your large group meetings and discipleship groups.

GOAL: Steadily engaging students in great weekly rhythms: small group Bible study, worship and preaching, Christian community, service and evangelism, and ongoing outreach.

- Rhythms produce inevitable and steady growth.
- **Don't be discouraged** if you FEEL that you've lost some momentum. You'll get it back. A drop in attendance is normal.
- This is when you **recruit** ALL your new staff members or interns for next year (if you can invite people to join your team) and many of your summer missionaries. It's perhaps not when they officially "sign on the dotted line," but lots of recruiting and encouraging conversations now will lead to big decisions later.
- If your ministry adds new student leaders twice a year, you're also recruiting student leaders during this time.

Questions to ask leading up to this season:

- What are the weekly rhythms our ministry needs to reinforce the vision we're casting?
- Who are the students I need to have an ICNU (I See In You) conversation with regarding staff, interns or mission?
- What are some things we can do to help increase interest for our Spring Break or Summer Missions opportunities?

OFF-SEASON 1: Winter

Winter is a great time to thank your donors, ministry partners, and volunteers, as well as send a good out a good newsletter.

GOAL: Catch your breath, evaluate, get organized for spring

- Make sure you've made plans for your winter conference and Spring Break trips.
- Even if you don't have much time, one to three **great planning days pay HUGE benefits**. Do things like schedule out some of your weekly rhythms like teaching series and Bible studies, plan your student leaders' orientation, clean and organize your meeting space and storage closets, etc.

Questions to ask leading up to this season:

- Who are the people who really made ministry in the fall possible and how can I show them appreciation or share with them what God is doing?
- What is happening in the Spring that I can plan out right now?
- What's a good book or two I can read over the winter break?

SEASON 3: January to Spring Break

Let be Spring Break be something you build up to that helps you gain momentum to finish the semester well.

GOAL: Jump quickly into weekly rhythms: small group Bible study, worship and preaching, Christian community, service and evangelism, and ongoing outreach. These produce imperceptible but certain and steady growth.

- Have a smaller kickoff than the fall, but still have a great social event and a big emphasis on your first worship service.
- Try to **make new contacts**, but following up with the contacts from the previous semester will be super fruitful. Circle back to people who didn't stick in the fall. Many will give you a second chance.
 - Gather your student leaders a couple of days before classes begin to divide up every single phone number you collected in the fall, and call/text them all with a **personal invite to worship**.

- During this season, plan some fun events to which your Christian students can bring non-Christian friends. Don't focus on events, but having a couple of great ones can help students do relational evangelism.
- **Emphasize students discipling** other students, students starting evangelistic Bible studies, and students reaching into affinity groups.
- **Some students will be ready for a big challenge** – doing personal evangelism for the first time, committing to missions, and asking them to stay in dorms to reach first-year students the next fall. Be bold in what you challenge them to do!

Use Spring Break

Like the Fall semester built toward Fall Retreat, the spring builds toward Spring Break. Have one or more excellent Spring Break options. If not all of your staff team goes on a mission trip, consider doing local ministry with international students stuck on campus. **They'll be receptive since they're not burdened with attending classes.** You can use Spring Break trips in a variety of ways:

- Consider doing a combo mission trip and fun trip with students working hard on ministry projects in the morning and afternoon, doing worship and Bible study each morning, and then having fun social activities in the evening. Even non-Christians could come and have a blast.
- Another option would be to use your Spring Break mission trip to do a vision or mission trip to another city or campus where you are trying to cast vision on beginning new work.
- Some ministries take Spring Break to host a well-done discipleship training retreat. **Whatever you do, do something!**

Questions to ask leading up to this season:

- When can I gather my student leaders before the semester to recast vision and re-establish a follow up plan with new contacts?
- Who do we need to personally invite to Spring Break and how can we use that to further grow our students?
- Who in our ministry is ready to be challenged for the next step of leadership in our ministry?

SEASON 4: Spring Break to Finals

You may think this season is the least busy, but it can be surprisingly hectic since you're (1) doing all your weekly ministry, (2) fundraising for summer missions or projects, and (3) thinking about next fall... all at the same time!

GOAL: Developing students for (1) summer missions, (2) ministry the following fall, and (3) post-graduation life.

- Momentum will feel slower, but some SUPER important stuff is happening.
- Don't plan big events. **Finish steady and strong.**

Questions to ask during this season:

- Who are the students I want to invite into leadership roles in the Fall?
- What can I do to help my graduates launch well into what is next?
- What do I need to put together for our Summer Bible Study or discipleship plan?

OFF-SEASON 2: Summer

Good off-seasons make great seasons. There is a temptation in the off-season to not be thoughtful with your time. DON'T DO IT. One good day of planning saves MULTIPLE days of stress later on. Preparing well during off-seasons frees you to focus on students during key times. Instead of saying, "Ugh, I wish I had done this months ago," you say, "I'm so glad I did that months ago!"

GOAL: Planning like a BOSS.

- Great fall semesters (actually great YEARS) are made in summer. **Plan to WIN** during the summer!
- If you support raise, May is fundraising season. Go as all in as possible.
 - Make financial support appointments for your personal support or your ministry budget.
 - Do you have other staff? Coach and encourage them and give them referrals for potential donors.
 - Considering doing ZERO events for four weeks in May and focused on getting staff fully funded.
- **Plan a strong leadership orientation** for August. Make all the arrangements ahead of time and communicate with your leaders a few times throughout the summer.

- If you have students around during the summer, doing a summer Bible study or discipleship training project is great. But don't do it all yourself.
- It's a great time to **empower students to lead** since they have even more available time and crowds are smaller. Give them LOTS of leadership and responsibility. Let them lead Bible study instead of you teaching weekly.
- Keep it simple!

Questions to ask during this time:

- What will the beginning-of-the-year outreach look like? How much can I buy, plan, and organize now?
- What curriculum will small groups use?
- Will we do a fall retreat? Have all the details DONE by July.
- What systems and organization do we need? Contact management software/spreadsheet, mass communication like a text messaging service, training materials?
- What publicity and promo materials do we need like postcards, banners, posters, etc.? Design and order it all now.

Evaluate and Plan

At the conclusion of each season is a time for some evaluation and planning. Take a few hours or a day to catch your breath and honestly evaluate and plan before diving into the next busy season. Consider evaluating all of your events and processing using a leadership pipeline or evaluation the grow of your overall ministry culture using an assessment tool like the College Ministry Assessment Tool on the Via Students website to evaluate regularly and ask, "Am I on the right track to become a multiplying ministry?" Because plans are only as good as the information they are based on, you are in a good position to tweak your plans for the next season at the conclusion of your current season.