

Why Charter A Campus Ministry?

We are often asked the questions, “Why charter a student organization? What are the advantages? Are there any concerns? How do you go about chartering a campus ministry?” These are all good questions that need clear answers.

The primary reason for chartering is to allow accessibility to the campus and to the students. For campuses with dorms, the vast majority of students live on the campus. This access is vital in order to build relationships with students. Secular colleges are very sensitive as to who comes on to their campuses. The campus security/police are constantly watching for unauthorized guests and are prepared to address any unsanctioned activities. Without a charter the campus worker is extremely limited as to what they can do on campus. If the campus worker is a part of a chartered organization then they have access to the campus, the use of vacant classrooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, outdoor amphitheatres, the campus postal system, the kiosks, etc. It is true that a local church can have ministry with students without being chartered, but they are limited in their contact to only the students who invite them onto the campus. Since campus ministry includes a five-fold scope, this access includes ministry to undergraduate and graduate students, single and married students, international students, and faculty and staff. A charter grants access to all the students, including the international students. It also allows access to the faculty, staff and employees of the university.

A chartered organization is given visibility on the campus and credibility in the minds of students and faculty. A campus ministry is able to advertise all their activities, Bible studies, etc., to the students. All the groups are listed in the universities directories, catalogs, websites, brochures, etc. Strong credibility is given to chartered organizations. Those that are not chartered tend to be looked at with disdain by the administration and are even questioned by the students. From the student’s view point they often see such organizations as weird, unethical, suspect or unloving. They assume that if an organization wants to help students then such an organization would take the sacrificial steps to meet them on their turf – the campus. There is a huge credibility gap when organizations do not even cross the line onto their campus. This is especially magnified when most churches, denominations, cults; world religions are properly recognized/chartered and present on the campus. The student thinks it strange that your group is not chartered. When not chartered, the campus workers often feel that they are involved in a clandestine operation. They feel uncomfortable on the campus and are constantly wondering if they are violating school policy. However, once chartered, the school recognizes your organization and permits you to fulfill your objectives with students. In fact, the campus missionary/pastor is often asked to serve as a chaplain for some branch of the campus or to act as an available counselor for students who have needs.

There is the element of networking when an organization is chartered. Students will hear of a ministry on a campus or get involved in a ministry. Students and their parents make decisions at times based on the religious groups chartered on the campus. When they transfer to another school or talk about other colleges they will see if a particular ministry is chartered on that prospective campus. The students networking focus typically begins with campus ministries on campus and then work out to the churches in the area. Such networking will lend itself to more contacts and visitors. To be involved with an organization that has some national presence is a real advantage in the chartering process. The secular colleges are more prone to approve such applications than they are with the application from a singular entity.

There is also a financial benefit to being chartered. Typically, organizations that are chartered have free access to the facilities. Some colleges provide free parking, or free gym passes for those involved in a chartered ministry. There are a number of services that are freely offered or greatly discounted to chartered organizations. Some schools actually provide a financial allotment to each student organization.

The process to be chartered involves finding out first what the college/university requires for organizations to be chartered. Typically it involves a petition of interest from a number of full-time, current students. The number varies from campus to campus and ranges usually between one and twelve students. It also involves the need of a constitution and bylaws. The college usually provides a sample, constitution/bylaws. Cross Impact has a number of sample constitutions. The most sensitive issues on the wording of the constitution involve the relationship of the local church and its leadership with the campus organization and the guidelines for membership for the student group. The most delicate wording will deal with sexual orientation issues. We have samples on how to word these requirements, which have been legally recommended to us. In addition to a petition, a constitution/bylaws, the colleges often ask for student officers (i.e. president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary) and a faculty advisor or an employee of the university. Once this information has been gathered and forms filled out for the college, they are then submitted to the college for approval or disapproval. This approval process can take one day or up to one semester to complete. Often such charters are good for one year and need to be renewed on an annual basis. The university will state their requirements and usually notify you of the times to renew. However, do not count on them communicating with you on the renewal. You will want to take the initiative to see what the terms of the charter are and the procedure for renewal.

To charter on the secular campus does not obligate you to be a part of any other religious organization on your campus or in your city. Your organization is governed by your local church and stands alone as a separate entity on the secular campus. You are listed as a ministry just as churches are listed in a phone book. No Biblical principles are violated in being a chartered ministry.