

MEETING WITH FACULTY | Campus Minister's Guide

Practical postures for approaching, respecting, and building lasting trust with faculty on your campus

At a Glance

Before You Reach Out	As the Relationship Grows	Signs of Growing Connection and Trust
- Recognize how full their plate probably is - Get curious: look up their work before you meet - Don't start with big vision and big asks. - Play to strengths and skills they already have	- Be a connector - Expect the relationship to unfold over time - Keep what's shared with you in confidence	- They respond to a vision for community on campus - They introduce you to other faculty - They say yes to small, specific asks - They're direct and open with you

BEFORE YOU REACH OUT

Respect Their Time

Between teaching, research, advising, and committee work, most faculty members' plates are already full, and that's before accounting for family, church, and life outside the university. Ask only what's necessary, and remember that faculty time is a premium, not a given.

Curiosity Is Your Best Friend

Faculty have given years of their lives to their disciplines because they're passionate about them and believe they're living out a calling through their work. You don't need to be an expert in what they study: genuine curiosity goes further than credentials. Look them up, skim their faculty page, ask a student who knows them. A few informed questions put you ahead of the curve.

Dream Big . . . But Start Small and Specific

Faculty are skilled at saying no to big, vague asks. Save the grand vision for later and lead with something small and concrete: an invitation to speak, a student who'd value a conversation about grad school. Trust builds through small, positive interactions. The bigger possibilities follow.

Play to Their Strengths

Consider what a faculty member already spends their time doing, and let that shape what you ask of them. Speaking to students, advising on next steps, or opening a door into their professional network all draw on skills they already have and already trust themselves to use well.

AS THE RELATIONSHIP GROWS

Understand Your Role as a Connector

Most Christian faculty already have a church community and a pastor, so pastoral care usually isn't the gap you're filling. What you can uniquely offer is connection: to students, to ministry opportunities, and to one another. Many faculty feel isolated as the only believer in their department and need someone to help them find their people. That someone can be you.

Longevity Is Key

Faculty are rooted on campus in a way students aren't, and they've watched staff come and go. It may take two or three years, sometimes more, before a faculty member gives you real time and attention. That's not a sign of failure; it's realistic. And when you do move on, do your best to pass on the trust you've built to whoever comes next.

Don't Take Criticism Personally

Many faculty are critical people by nature and by training; that instinct doesn't have an off switch. Pointed questions or unenthusiastic feedback aren't a verdict on you or your work. If anything, take it as a sign they're invested enough to want you and your work to flourish.

Keep Confidences

What faculty share with you in confidence stays in confidence, including how, when, and with whom they choose to share about their faith or their involvement with Christian groups on campus. It is never our place to “out” a Christian faculty member without their expressed permission. Discretion here is what earns and protects their trust.

Note: Every principle here has exceptions. Most faculty won't have time for your grand plan, but some will. Most won't look to you for pastoral care, but some will. Most will take years to trust you, but some will be eager to jump in right away. Stay attentive, pray for your faculty, and listen to them: they know better than anyone what they need and what they're able to offer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Geoff Van Dragt

[PLACEHOLDER:
headshot photo]

Geoff Van Dragt lives in Seattle, Washington, where he and his wife, Ashley, do ministry with graduate students and faculty at the University of Washington. When he isn't busy with his work on campus, he enjoys spending time with his wife and son, Elias, as well as with their backyard ducks and chickens.