“So what do you think of ISU?”

I sat for a long time on the other end of the phone before answering my sister. It was my first visit to the school, and I already knew that I had to transfer there for practical reasons. I tried to remain positive.

“Well,” I said, looking out at the quad, “…the trees are pretty.”

The campus tour I had just finished had been less than impressive. The student housing tour took me through a massive concrete building, with impersonal suite-style floors which made me more inclined to beat my head against a wall than find a room in which to nest. The meeting I had scheduled with an academic advisor had gone smoothly, but it was not enough to make me feel at home.

“I just can’t imagine living here,” I told my sister over the phone, despondent.

“It will be what you make it” she told me. “You know that you’ll be fine as long as you make friends. Just don’t be all reclusive and weird.”

“I know…”

“Get involved in something. Did you ask about student organizations? Or how about a campus ministry?”

I explained that when I had asked about student organizations during the tour, I was informed that I could find a list of the 300 RSOs in an office in a wing of the Bone Student center. Being new to campus, I had no idea how to get there, and dismissed the thought of even trying.

“You’ve just got to find the other people on campus who are like you. You know – weird, Christian, artsy, intellectual people who drink too much coffee and laugh at stupid inside jokes. Your people.”

“Right,” I said. “My people.”
A few hours later, I began my four hour drive home rather disheartened. As I passed behind the student center, a few students caught my eye. They were playing bags and laughing on the front lawn of a house. On the side of the building was a mural and a sign that read “encounter”.

Reminding myself that I had nothing to lose, I pulled into the parking lot. I psyched myself up for a few minutes before getting out of my car and tentatively waving hello to the smiling strangers.

“Hi,” I said. “I was just driving by, and um… what’s encounter?”

They eagerly invited me into the building which I would later know simply as “the Campus House”, a sort of second home which would outlast every apartment I leased during my stints at ISU. Inside, the house was covered in art and filled with inviting furniture, draped upon which were the students I had met outside. I settled into an unoccupied bean bag chair as a girl named June explained that encounter was a campus ministry, an organization for Christian students. I couldn’t help but smile at the comfort I found in her high fashion bangs and the flecks of paint which spotted her jeans, rolled up to reveal hand made ankle bracelets. I nodded as she spoke of a weekly large group worship meeting, and smaller bible studies. Then she said five words which made my insides warm. “We just… do life together.”

June spoke of community, and of a feeling of togetherness which extended beyond religious meetings. She spoke of playing and laughing and praying and crying together, of supportive friendships and a network of people who were dedicated to loving one another, and struggling to model themselves after Jesus’ life.

As I drove out of town that night, I called my sister back.

“I found them,” I said.

“Who?”

“My people.”

*****

My story is not unique to encounter, or for that matter, ISU. Though they may not all be as intentional as I was, most newcomers to a college campus are looking for friends, for support, for their people. Universities understand this desire, and have long put effort into fostering “community” on campus, through Greek life, sports teams, “school spirit” campaigns, and student organizations. I noticed, however, that the university does not actively promote, or for that matter even mention, campus ministry to incoming students. As a researcher, I wondered if and how these neglected student organizations are a source of community on campus – do students turn to religious organizations to find friends and support in the same way that the university hopes they turn to Greek life and school culture? If so, how do campus ministries, which often have the characteristics of both student organizations and community churches, aim to create a sense of community in a university environment such as ISU’s campus?

Seeking Community on Campus

At ISU, the sports teams generate little fanaticism. Even those who regularly attend football games admit that the team is pretty bad, and other sports fare no better. As far as school spirit goes, there is a running joke among some students that the “Spread the Red” campaign would be better suited to a communist invasion or outbreak of Chlamydia.
Rarely do you meet a student who has the same passion for “Reggie Redbird” as do their counterparts at U of I for the highly polemic Chief Illiniwek.

Illinois State University is, however, intentional about Greek life. The “get involved” section of the dean of students’ website has devoted more space to Greek Life than to any other area of involvement, explaining the potential benefits and attempting to dispel the many myths about Greek organizations. They explain that fraternities and sororities foster leadership skills, provide social and support networks, and encourage social service and volunteer work. Even those who are generally opposed to Greek life admit that they “can be your family away from family”, and help students make friends with shared interests.

However, there are many students, often from religious backgrounds, who want all those benefits of community but would never join a Greek organization because of their negative perceptions of the lifestyle. Many students I spoke with expressed near disgust at the picture they had of frat or sorority life, where you “pay to have friends who are only your friends as long as you’ll drink with them”.

Those students still need somewhere to turn to for their “family away from family”, to find ways to be in community, get leadership skills, and be supported through their college experience. Many turn to campus religious organizations, also known as campus ministries.

**Campus Ministries at ISU**

Though the promotion of the 26 registered social fraternities/sororities makes them more visible, the 18 registered student religious organizations have an equitable impact in the lives of students. In fact, while most Greek organizations cut off chapter membership at around thirty students, religious organizations such as Fuel or encounter gather hundreds of students each week; though it is difficult to track because of cross attendance and lack of a membership system, it appears that more students are engaging in religious activities with campus ministries than are joining frats or sororities.

To those who are not involved, however, campus ministries are a relatively unimpressive presence on campus. Rarely are religious flyers posted in school buildings, and even those signs or advertisements that religious groups put out often omit religious language, under the (often correct) assumption that students who would be interested in attending religious services will recognize the nature of groups with vague names like “encounter”, “Fuel”, or “Navigators”.

**Methodology: An insider’s attempt at an outsider’s perspective**
I chose to study campus ministry partly because it has defined much of my own college experience, and partly because it is so often ignored as an important generator of community and service.

More than once, concerns have been raised during my research as to the potential bias I may bring. I am an active participant in encounter, the campus ministry I aim to study. This position has both negative and positive consequences; though my perspective is arguably less objective than a complete stranger to encounter, my experiences provide a much more intimate analysis than could have been achieved with outsider status.

In many important ways, I am an insider. I have attended meetings and activities at encounter since my first visit to the school. Most of my friends are in some way or another connected with encounter, many of them even in positions of student leadership or currently serving as interns. I have been active in generating some of the networks that I will later describe. Certainly, as a participant observer, I am most often viewed as a participant, and throughout my research I felt the need to continually remind myself and my friends that I was also a researcher.

In other ways, I had sufficient outsider status. Though I have attended encounter since I transferred, I had only been at ISU for two semesters when I began my research, and had only been particularly active for one. I, myself, am not a student leader, and do not directly participate in the decision making processes of encounter. Encounter is also a large enough organization that I only know a fraction of its community intimately.

Ultimately, I found my insider status to be more of a help than a hindrance. It allowed a level of access which I would not have gotten otherwise, making interviews and observations of private meetings much easier to obtain. My own experiences also gave me insight into the community building processes of encounter. For example, when the staff talked about the ways in which students typically interact with encounter, I could compare their assumptions to my own experience, giving me a much more multi-dimensional approach.

Still, my methodology was influenced heavily by my attempts to observe as an outsider. I conducted many interviews with staff and students at encounter, including student leaders and students who were very new to the group. I also attended meetings between the staff and student leadership team and observed periodically at the campus house. I continued to attend worship meetings as a participant, but also intentionally set aside nights that I would attend as an observer. I often brought my camera and took photographs as a form of data collection. I found that visual data had a raw, honest quality that clued me in to patterns or ideas that I would have been blind to otherwise; the photographs almost forced an outsider perspective on me as I drew information out of the images days after the initial observation, more removed from the event.

Whether or not my research was aided by my previous knowledge and experience with encounter, I have been able to gain much deeper understanding of the organization throughout my research, and was surprised again and again by the information I gathered. In order to mitigate any bias I may have, I have sought not to evaluate, but simply identify and analyze encounter’s contributions to student life at ISU.

Liquid Church: The Structure of Encounter
"I think we are a kind of Church", Mark says to me as he tries to explain the structure of encounter again. This is the third time I have approached him with follow-up questions after our formal interview. I am having difficulty understanding, because while encounter appears to be devoid of meaningful hierarchy or bureaucracy, I am slowly uncovering the near invisible infrastructure which holds the organization together.

The staff is adamant about the "relational" nature of the organization – that is, in every aspect, encounter must value individual people and personal interaction even when making institutional decisions. It also serves a rapidly changing constituency; between transfers and graduations, encounter’s entire student body can change in just a few years. The structure then must be flexible enough to allow its ever evolving community to shape and mold the focus and personality of encounter.

But with such an unstable membership base, encounter must also be structured enough to withstand massive losses in population or student leadership, as well as retain some semblance of tradition and purpose. It is both a registered student organization (RSO), which must face rapid turnover and compete with the academic, financial and social demands of student life. It is also a church, which must maintain integrity of purpose and vision.

How could an organization possibly be structured in such a way that it remains relational, flexible, and ever-evolving, and yet steadfast in purpose and stable through change? Campus minister Mark Johnson visualizes the goal for the structure of encounter in a Tuesday night worship service using, of all things, a physics metaphor. He describes churches that act like solids – well structured, with a sense of permanence, but so rigid that they are unable to move, adapt or get anything done. He contrasts "gaseous" churches, full of great ideas and passion, but lacking the stability to ever act – essentially full of hot air. The ideal, he says, is to be a "liquid church". Liquid churches, he says, have just enough structure to maintain stability, and just enough flexibility to move and mold and adapt to wherever they are called upon to go. So what does a liquid church look like?

**The Board of Directors**

"Well, there’s the board,” Mark says. “And some people think that they would be like the ‘elders’ of encounter, but they’re not.” The board of directors, while made up of Christians from local churches, exists not to provide specifically spiritual decisions, but rather major financial decisions. Certainly, Mark says, spirituality must play a role in all financial decisions, but he make it clear that the vision and dynamic (such as style of worship or even theology) is not up to the board.

However, the board has control over the finances and hiring/firing of encounter, which can have a profound effect on day to day ministry. For example, Mark says that part
of the reason he was hired is probably because he has a degree from a bible college, and at the time the board valued such credentials. Now the board is more concerned with skills and experience, which is why Luke and Mary Matthews, the other two paid staff, were hired despite their lack of formal training.

Over ten years ago when Mark first came to encounter, the board was much larger and more rigidly structured. The board held 12-15 members who served 3 year terms with a mandatory year off between terms. There were other restrictions, such as the limit of 2 board members from any one church, and the specific requirements of invitation to become a member. When Mark began to work with the board, they decided that this was too complex and rigid a structure for governing a body like encounter. Many restrictions were lifted and the board became smaller and more flexible.

Now the board consists of six members, all alum of encounter, who meet with the staff 4 to 5 times a year. “It’s nice,” says Mark, “because I don’t have to clue them into what the ministry is about. They know, because [they were a part of it once].”

In some ways, the board is just archaic remains of a time when the success of a campus ministry was directly related to its affiliations with local churches. But the board has come to fill other important roles. It provides stability to an organization in which most of the active members are replaced every few years due to graduations and incoming students. It also balances the power of the organization, so that no single person, be it staff, student or board member, has the authority to make major decisions without the consent of other leaders.

**The Staff**

“The staff,” Mark says, “I guess they would be more like the elders of encounter.”

Far too spry for the term “elders”, the paid members of staff are the most visible authorities within encounter. In fact, most students would recoil at the use of the term “authority” for Mark, Luke and Mary, who are considered friends and confidants to many at encounter.

The man with whom I am talking now is Mark Johnson, the senior staff member. He is often introduced to parents as “the Campus Minister”, but students know him as Mark. Mark is, in many ways, the face of encounter to both students and community members. In his office is an overstuffed chair and loveseat, often occupied by students stopping by to chat. Conversation with Mark is easy and casual, and his ability to make students, parents and strangers feel welcome is a large part of his job, and essential to the organization.

Mark has a degree from a bible college has been with encounter since 1996, when he changed its name from the considerably less trendy “Christian Collegians”. Since Mark’s arrival, the focus of the ministry, as well as campus ministries across the country, has shifted from hierarchy and connections to local authorities, to more intimate relationships and community building. As a result, most students do not think of Mark as a distant leader or other-worldly figure, but rather as a “down to earth, genuine guy”. Each week during worship services, Mark speaks for 35-50 minutes about scripture, Christian living, and the trials of everyday life. Mark and his wife Martha have five children, and Mark often shares stories of the love, frustration, and joys of marriage and fatherhood. These are called “talks” instead of “sermons”, and most students say they don’t experience the negative connotations associated with “being preached at”. Rather, the talks are
conversational in style, and students respond to a raw honesty and openness Mark displays each week.

The other full time member of encounter’s staff is Luke Matthews, often described as the worship leader or coordinator. He and his wife Mary, a part time member of the staff, began working with encounter in 2004 after 6 years with a campus ministry at Eastern University, where they both went to school. In addition to organizing and leading encounter’s worship band, Luke handles much of the administrative and financial aspects of encounter.

Luke and Mary both spend a large portion of their time with students, specifically those on the “leadership team”. Each week, they meet with the 20 or so leaders for “discipleship”, which is the process by which individuals (students or staff) invest relationally into others. Luke and Mary meet with each student leader once a week, to see how they are doing, spend time with them, give them advice or study scripture. Luke describes discipleship as “a long term, grinding family process” of “life transfer” between people who care for one another, and who are intentionally encouraging each other in their pursuit of God.

Mary says that her discipleship meetings are usually just conversations with students about how their life is going. As leaders, she says, they are often the ones providing support for other students, and discipleship gives them an opportunity to seek that support from staff.

Leadership Team

Each academic year, the staff selects a team of students for the leadership team. The roles of this team are varied, from leading weekly student bible studies, to intentional investment in student non-leaders, to organizing social events and reaching out to students who are not as involved.

Mark says that there are four characteristics each leader must possess: faithfulness, availability, teachability, and extroversion. In order to serve the needs of encounter, the leadership base certainly must be “faithful” to the Christian value system, as well as actively pursing and strengthening that faith. They must be “teachable” so that the staff can build them up as leaders and give them the skills necessary to teach others. Availability is a large factor because of the extensive commitment a position on the leadership team requires: between attending large group worship, leadership meetings, discipleship meetings with staff, and small group activities and preparation, leadership requires a commitment of at least 15 hours a week and dedicates three nights a week to leadership activities. Finally, since all of these commitments revolve around fostering and facilitating friendships, leaders must be energized by other people, or they will quickly burn out.

The leadership team exists so that students themselves are investing in other students. Since the staff cannot spend time weekly with every individual member of encounter, they meet with and care for those students on leadership, who are then charged with meeting with and caring for a specific set of students – the members of their weekly bible study, also known as their “small group”. Student leaders are also asked to disciple at least one student a semester, in much the same way as they are being discipled by staff.

It is through this pattern of staff to leadership to student investment that creates a sustainable yet flexible structure for encounter. New students are constantly being
empowered and taught leadership skills which include the ability to bring in new students and leaders. Meanwhile, the staff and the board provide a stability to encounter that many RSOs lack, allowing it to maintain integrity through the fluctuations which come naturally to student organizations. It is this unique aspect of encounter which enables it to fulfill its goals of relationship building.

**Encounter: “Doing Life Together”**

I think everything encounter embodies, if its going to be improving our encounter with Christ, it means that we have to be relational – I believe that everything that Christ was about was relational, so therefore everything that we do has to be relational.

– Mark Johnson

Luke Matthews admits that every campus ministry and indeed every church has, at it’s core, a mission based upon the Great Commission – Jesus’ call to all of his followers to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Each organization has its own quirks and callings, however, and Luke says that’s encounter’s particular personality has developed a passion for relationship building. Even the name “encounter” seeks to communicate the importance of interaction and relationships; another staff member said that the purpose of engaging in the groups is to encounter other people, and together encounter God.

The success of the group, Luke says, is not based on how many attend large group worship, but rather he gauges success through the “life-change” he sees in students over their tenure at the ministry, which he claims is largely dependent on intentional relationships.

Jude, a student member, says that he sees encounter as a “tool Christians can use to be in fellowship with one another and to learn how the body of Christ acts.” Another student, Paul, compares encounter to a parking lot – a safe place to learn to drive, with others who can lead and teach you before you face the road on your own. Encounter “provide[s] a place
that people can feel welcome and safe,” he says, where people can explore what it means to
live life as a Christian in Christian community.

I was curious about how encounter seeks to generate community – a term which is
plastered to every flyer, sign and statement associated with the group. The concept of
community is a very vague, but prominent one at encounter and in many Christian circles. 
Encounter staff member Mary Matthews even called it “Christian-ese”, one of many words
which has its own connotations among Christians and requires further definition.

**Community and Fellowship**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*

In several interviews, both students
and staff said they model their ideas of
community on a particular passage of
scripture, Acts 2:42. Christian community, they explained, should include such things as
studying scripture together, spending time in *fellowship*, sharing meals and engaging in
forms of corporate worship such as prayer.

Student member Zach said that while everyone is a part of certain communities that
develop because of proximity (apartment complexes or dorms) and shared goals (class,
work, etc), encounter is specifically intentional about its community, and the ways in which
people interact.

Most students I spoke with said that encounter fosters a community in which people
can rely on each other and support one another. They spoke of having a family away from
home, and having people they could laugh, cry, play, work, pray, worship and live with.
Mark Johnson also emphasized the importance of
creating a common sense of purpose. Though encounter
has a very diverse student population, celebrating the
common purpose of “growing together in Christ” allows
students with different backgrounds and interests to be
intimately connected.

One of the ways in which encounter intentionally
fosters such community is through *fellowship* activities.
Fellowship is essentially just a social gathering, without a
specific purpose other than to enjoy one another. One
student told me that it’s “easy to get caught up in
learning about Christ and not learning about each other”.
The remedy is to build a core bond among students
through *fellowship* activities such as cook outs, parties,
retreats, games and more.
Luke explained that encounter is very fellowship focused at the beginning of every academic year. The aim over the course of the year is to progress from many social activities which build friendships and fewer service and worship activities, to less formal social gatherings and a higher focus on service work and intimate worship.

**Small and Large Group**

One of the most public aspects of encounter is its weekly worship service, held Tuesday nights at 9pm in one of the auditoriums on campus. Large group worship is a relatively low priority of encounter’s. The staff and leadership recognize it’s importance for bringing in newcomers, as well as the intrinsic value of worshiping with others, but it is most valuable because it facilitates the process of getting people involved in small groups.

Small groups, which are also called bible studies or family groups, consist of at least one member of the leadership team and 5-7 other students. It is within small groups that encounter most effectively generates a feeling of family and community, because each group meets once a week, often in the homes of the leaders, to read and grapple with scripture, share about their lives, and develop meaningful friendships.

Mark Johnson stresses the flexibility of these groups with regard to the “bible study” aspect. He says that the bible study gives the group structure, but that it is more of a “springboard” for discussion than a rigid outline. The purpose of reading scripture in this environment is largely to provide a spiritual basis for the relationships built there. The study itself, Mark says, is often de-prioritized when group members have other needs to address, from venting about personal problems to studying together during finals or just relaxing together when everyone is stressed. These small groups provide the basis for encounter as a system of support for students, as they become friends and learn to rely on one another.

Friendships built in small groups are reinforced during large group worship, and often develop beyond the structure of encounter so that students are organizing activities for themselves, expanding and strengthening the community more organically. In this way, students coming together under the common purpose of worship and Christian life can build or join a vast array of extremely diverse networks of other Christian students.
Encounter and Social Capital:
From internal community to external networks

It is a windy and grey Monday morning as I cut across the quad and duck into an alcove between two prominent buildings on campus. I walk to the very end of the buildings where three students sit in a pile of trash, talking about art and the wastefulness of our consumer culture.

“Would you like some bagels?” a girl asks as I come nearer.

The girl is Maggie, an art major and member of encounter, and what I am walking into is a living sculpture she has made for a class. From the looks of it, a passerby would have no idea that it is made of “trash”, items discarded by their owners and left on curbs, in dumpsters or even the side of the road. Maggie went around collecting furniture, books, and even food which had been discarded and assembled her collection in the form of a living room. Her goal is to both call attention to the wastefulness of our culture and inspire students to be more creative with waste. In fact, all the items in her “living room” are available to viewers to take and use in their own homes. She has dedicated her day to lounging in her constructed "living room" and inviting passersby to have food, sit for conversation, and take any of the furniture they want.

On a side table is an assortment of day-old bagels gleaned from a bag of baked goods tossed behind a nearby Panera Bread Co. I had been with Maggie the night before as she scavenged.

“I totally smell like garbage,” Maggie had giggled to me as she climbed out of the dumpster behind the local Aldi. On the concrete was quite a surprising collection of food, everything from oranges and apples to cookies and soda, all abandoned earlier that day by the store. After sorting through the garbage to locate food that was still fresh and edible, Maggie gathered it to be taken home, washed thoroughly and eaten.
Maggie practices what is called, among other things, “dumpster diving”, “urban foraging”, “waste reclamation”, or, as she likes to call it “grocery hunting”. It extends beyond food, however, and freegan.info describes urban foraging as “the act of recovering useable goods discarded by retailers, schools, homes, businesses, construction sites - really anywhere anyone is throwing away goods that shouldn't be wasted.”

In addition to relying on waste reclamation as a source for groceries, Maggie has literally turned it into an art form – and today she is lounging in it.

I grab a bagel and plop down on an unoccupied couch cushion as the conversation resumes. The topic shifts fluidly from consumerism to social justice. A girl named Phoebe laments about the shortcomings of the Peace Corps, and I mention an alternative program I’ve been looking into run by the Jesuits.

She asks about the religious nature of the program, and explains her own Christian upbringing. After a while, she mentions that she has been thinking about finding a church to attend.

“Have you ever thought about coming to encounter?” Maggie asks.

“Yeah, that’s where you go, right?” Phoebe answers. “I don’t know, maybe I should try it sometime. When does it meet?”

As I explain about encounter, Maggie stands up to greet another friend who has come by to see her work. This friend overhears our conversation and mentions to Maggie that she’s been thinking about coming to encounter too.

“I’ll give you a call tomorrow before the service,” she says to Maggie before leaving to go to class.

Though it was not affiliated with encounter in any way, many of the people who came to support Maggie’s work or even just stop by and chat were either members of encounter or began talking about it. As they sat in the "living room", two conversations continually came up; one was about "freecycling" and the benefits toward both the environment and meeting social needs, and the other was about encounter and Christianity.

It quickly became evident in my research that interest oriented subcultures and networks of encounter, in this case a mixture of the art, environmentalist, and social justice oriented cultures, are crucial to its larger appeal, and it's ability to bring in newcomers.

**Artists**
Artists contribute to a substantial subculture at encounter. Some of these artists are students ISU’s program, others at Heartland, and still other non-students or former students who attend encounter. The two media which are most popular are paint and photography. It is not uncommon to see a cluster of encounter students painting on the quad or piling into cars on their way to various strange locations (abandoned schoolhouses, decaying bridges and truck graveyards, to name a few) to take photographs. The campus house itself is full of murals and student artwork, and encounter even holds an art show each semester called Gallery 300 to support students' art and to foster this subculture as an important source of community.

**Musicians**

Musicians also network through encounter. While some are students in the music department, many are just students who are musically inclined and have no other outlet or forum for their work. Encounter strives to create such a forum with their “writer’s guild”. The writer’s guild is supposed to take place monthly, but usually manages only a couple times a semester. Musicians are encouraged to perform recent work for one another for the purpose of critique. Jordon, a senior student heavily involved in both the worship band and writer’s guild, has a passion for audio recording. Though he is a sociology major, he has a recording studio in his basement. This fall, the writer’s guild released its first album, which Jordon produced for free.

Students also make up the majority of encounter’s worship band. In addition to worship leader and lead vocalist Luke Matthews on guitar, the band includes interns Micah and Jordon on drums and guitar respectively, and students Pete, Sara, and Leah on bass, backup vocals and the electric violin. It has, in the past, utilized the skills of various students on instruments like the mandolin, the jimbe, the box drum, and the viola. Musicians are also invited to perform for Gallery 300, and many have used the campus house to hold shows of their own.

**Other Networks**

Artists and musicians, while the most formally rooted in encounter, are just a few examples of student networks which extend beyond the campus ministry. Other networks include longboarders, academics, social activists, disc golfers, spots fans, television enthusiasts, poets and more. Encounter is able to support such a diverse population because
it allows students to find others with similar interests, all under the common goal of building relationships and living together as Christians.

**The Future of Campus Ministry and ISU**

Campus ministries like encounter are essential to community building among actively Christian students at ISU. Through large group worship, involvement in small groups, fellowship activities and service as well as leadership training and relationship building, encounter offers many of the same benefits ISU attributes, without the same stigma and party-culture. Despite its recognition of the need for student community and student involvement, the University has largely neglected student religious groups. I feel that the first step toward learning from their uniquely sustainable structure and truly utilizing the benefits of religious ministries is further study. I would strongly encourage future students involved in the EUI to consider a focus on religious life at the university, as it provides many insights into the semi-formal development of community in campus life. With respect to encounter in particular, the university and RSOs may benefit from further analysis of encounter’s structure. It may be useful to model other student organizations off of encounter, or perhaps hold workshops for new RSOs about how to create and maintain a stable student organization.

I would also like to recommend that the university itself refocus its efforts to engage students in community life. Greek life represents only a tiny percentage of student involvement, yet it dominates ISU’s student involvement campaigns. The most public and accessible effort of the university is Quad day, when RSOs are invited to set up tables on the quad each fall. While the event may generate interest in RSOs, it is difficult to actually connect with the people associated with RSOs in such a chaotic environment. If nothing else, the example of encounter illustrates that relationships between individuals are the most effective means to encourage involvement.

I would like to encourage the University to more actively and intentionally partner with RSOs throughout the year. The advertising during Quad Day should be supplemented with more substantive activities hosted jointly by the university and RSOs so that students can become familiar with the nature of each RSO and make friends with those already involved. Equally important are the RSOs efforts – organizations such as encounter would benefit greatly by pursuing active relationships with the faculty and administration of ISU, so as to better communicate ways in which the relationship between individual RSOs and the university can be mutually beneficial.

I look forward to continuing my research of encounter in the future, and hope that other students, researchers and ethnographers pursue the topic of campus ministry.