In this paper, I discuss the results of an ethnographic project about how encounter, a religious student organization, generates meaningful and sustainable community for students at Illinois State University. By way of participant observation at numerous encounter events, including worship, small groups, leadership meetings and social functions, as well as interviews with three staff members, two student leaders, and two student participants not on the leadership team, I show that encounter has a unique ability to meet the needs of Christian students because of its flexible yet durable leadership structure, its focus on building relationships as a primary goal, and its tendency to produce broad student networks which extend beyond the formal organization itself. Based on these preliminary findings, I argue that student religious groups in general demand more attention than they are currently receiving from researchers and the university administration. I also recommend that Illinois State University make a concentrated effort to establish ongoing relationships with all registered student organizations, so as to better promote successful student networking opportunities and improve communication with those organizations which shape the lies of many students on campus.

I tried to find information about religious groups on the ISU website. Through the site cataloging student organizations, I found this heading: Religious - Religious organizations offer students opportunities for spiritual programs. I followed this link to the list of religious organizations. Each has a description, which appears to be written by members of the organizations. Though these may not have been written by ISU officials, I thought it was important to analyze the descriptions, because by posting them to the website, ISU is in many ways endorsing the organizations and the information presented. Many of the descriptions provided are short, which seems to encourage readers to leave the ISU site and learn more at the group's homepage. ISU has no control over the material on independent web pages, though, so I chose three descriptions from the ISU site to analyze:

1. Catholic Student Association
Purpose:
The Catholic Student Association serves both the ISU campus and the IWU campus. Along with weekend masses, students are presented with opportunities to develop and strengthen their relationships with both God and their community through FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Bible studies, weekly Rosary and Adoration, daily Mass, retreats, service programs, guest speakers, and fellowship. All Catholics and non-Catholics are welcome to join in the life of the community.

I find it interesting that the first verb used to describe the organization is "serves". The description is written in third person, but emphasizes the programs and opportunities offered to the reader/potential participant. It seems very welcoming, open to Catholics and non-Catholics, but it seems very distant - though the last line emphasizes community life, all previous ideas center around individuals participating in pre-structured activities rather than inviting individuals to become part of the core of the organization. The group is here to serve you, not for you to necessarily become part of the group that serves.

Purpose:
The purpose of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship is to see students at ISU become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

This short description is oddly removed and uninviting. It suggests a passive presence and does not ask participation or suggest community environment.

Purpose:
We believe that there is power when a generation of people from every church and campus ministry in a community meet together once a week to worship and seek God together. So, that's what FUEL is, young adults passionately pursuing God and praying for unity and revival in our community.

This has strong language that suggests community, active participation within the group and action of the group that affects and interacts with the greater community at ISU. Most of the descriptions on the website mirror one of the first two - either highly structured organizations designed to serve students but not require them to engage in the greater purpose of the organization, or short statements of belief with little suggestion of community life. This is frustrating, because my own experience with such groups has proven to me that community and student empowerment are often the highest priorities in such groups. The third description seems more accurate to the nature of these groups, but still emphasizes a belief statement over a description of community life.

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Five Minute Observation:

As I exit my afternoon class in Schroeder Hall, I stop outside the main doors to observe. Other classes have just let out as well, and there is a flood of students exiting the building toward the Quad. I lean against the wall so as to stay clear of traffic, and am overwhelmed by the noise generated by the crowd. Several students stop near the doors; they are all starting or ending conversations, chatting on cell phones, or smoking cigarettes. Individual voices are drowned out, but most people seem to be engaged in small talk with classmates, while a few are obviously carrying on involved conversation with close friends.

The clamour dies down within a few minutes, and the remaining students continue to talk as a smaller stream of people come in and out of the building. There are three guys gathered around the freestanding ashtray near the doors, though only one is smoking.
Their conversation begins with complaints about class, but quickly moves into their plans for the weekend. It is only Thursday, but two of them express plans to "get trashed" tonight. The third declines their invitation to go out, saying that he has a class in the morning. After joking about going to class hungover or still drunk, the three go their separate ways.

Shortly after, the flood of people begins again, this time more slowly. People are beginning to filter back into the building to catch their next class.

(5) I have a hard time relating to the Basso text, because compared to the Apache, we assign very little moral value to the idea of place. Making the map, I actually felt as though the University as a place is rather incidental to my life - as a student, I spend much of my time studying. The campus just provides a setting for my studies, different atmospheres for the same activity.

**Question:**

Assignment #6/ M2 – My Question 1 pg. Write about your emerging research project. What question(s) will you try to answer? what inspired you? and how will you go about it researching this?

I would like to explore campus religious organizations and their relationship to student life/success within the university. I was inspired to research this topic because my own involvement with a campus religious group has given me insight into the advantages of participating in community life that meets regularly, supports academic activities and whose social opportunities are not based around traditional party culture.

My questions are varied and scattered at the moment:
What does it mean to be a member of a religious community at ISU?
How do support networks evolve in such groups?
How does involvement in such a community affect academic life?
How does ISU talk about, support or interact with campus religious groups? And how does ISU fail to do so?
Should ISU be more or less active in promoting campus ministries to students?

I hope to begin exploring some of these questions by participant observation within a campus religious group, interviewing leaders in the group (including academic advisers employed by ISU), and analysis of literature about religious groups written and promulgated by ISU.

Assignment #16/M8: Revise Research Plan/ Question.

I have discovered that "community" is highly prioritized at encounter. The word itself appears in much of the advertising/announcements literature, and is often cited by leaders as one of the primary goals in the group. Keeping this in mind, I would like to research:

How is community defined by members of the group?

How is community defined by leaders?

How does the discussion and promotion of community compare to observations of group life?

I will continue to pursue these topics through interviews with staff and students, observations of staff meetings, analysis of advertising literature, and observations of
student functions such as worship and small group meetings.

Plan: Assignment #6/ M2 – My Question 1 pg. Write about your emerging research project. What question(s) will you try to answer? what inspired you? and how will you go about it researching this?

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Participant Observation (&photo doc)- Large Group Worship Tuesday 10/16

Interview - Tim 10/17

Interview - Pete 10/18

Observation - Staff Meeting 10/29

Data: Observations

Campus House Observation

I am going to do my first observation at "the campus house", a building behind the Bone Student Center owned by encounter. Encounter hopes for the campus house to become a hub of sorts, where students wander in and out. I actually expect that very few people will be present for my observation, however, because most students fail to use it as a resource, either because they don't know about it, or because it never crosses their mind to come here outside of a scheduled event.

My observation begins around noon on a monday. I had come to the campus house about an hour earlier to meet with Mark Johnson, the campus minister at encounter. Currently, Mark, dressed in shorts and a t-shirt due to the 85 degree heat, is in his office with another student, Ben. Mark and Ben sit casually on the couches in Mark's office, the interior of which is visible to the rest of the building through a large window on the door.

I am working on the campus house's computer at the moment. This computer, which has internet access and is made available for students to use, is one of the main reasons I come here lately - my own computer is broken, and I'd rather
come here than the library.

To my left is Mark's office, to the right an office usually occupied by Luke Matthews, the worship director. Directly behind me is a foosball table, and beyond that lies a vast open area filled with mismatched couches and chairs. Along the walls are various pieces of art, all submitted by student for gallery shows and cd release parties thrown by encounter. At the back of the room is another office, which belongs to Mary Matthews, who works part time coordinating ministry and small groups.

Also in the house are two bathrooms and a kitchen, the latter of which is stocked with refreshments, sold by "the honor system". There is a jar in the refrigerator with a sign that reads: Pop 50 cents - No I.O.U.s, please!

After about ten minutes, I hear the front door creak open behind me. Peter, an intern and a friend of mine, walks in. "Hey," he says. "Have you seen Andrew?"

I swivel around and reply, "I have no idea who you are talking about." Peter nods, and looks intently at his checkered Vans. I get up and we chat for a few minutes about class. He says he is overwhelmed by the work he is doing for soc 300. I tell him that I am falling behind on work for my independent studies. He says he has been distracted by work in his recording studio. As we talk, I see another friend, June, approach the house on her long board. When she comes in, she greets each of us with a warm hello and a hug.

It is at this moment that a fear dawns on me that I am not observing, but participating. I am inextricable linked to this organization through friends, activities, and my own spirituality. The piece we read by Emerson et al, however, would suggest that this is not a problem. They write that an observer does not gain much from being removed, and that, in fact, much more information can be gathered by someone who participates and forms relationships with the community.

I certainly hope this is so, as June and I confirm plans for dinner tonight. Someone else walks into the building, and as Peter greets him, I realize it is Andrew. Peter and Andrew say a brief hello, before Peter says "Shall we?" and they head out. Now it is just June and I.

June's passion for art is evident even in her clothing. She is wearing large copper earrings, a yellow shirt undoubtedly found in a thrift store, and there are paint splatters all over her jeans. She has books in an army green messenger bag, and is still clutching her longboard.

With a subtle excitement, June tells me she has found a new service opportunity for our small group, which consists of 11 female students from encounter. I ask her what she has in mind, and she smiles and tells me it's a secret, and she'll tell all of us on Thursday when we meet next. As we talk, we gravitate toward the kitchen - June is in search of candy.
With great disappointment, June discovers that the candy bowl atop the refrigerator is empty. "I should refill it. I eat a lot of candy here," she admits.

We look up as Mary walks in. Mary, too, is dressed very casually, and seems to be in a hurry. "Hey girls!" she says with a wave as she heads to her office.

June sits at the computer to write an email (she, too, is without internet at her apartment right now), and I follow Mary to her office. I ask Mary’s casual permission to write my ethnography on encounter, assuring her that there will be more detailed release forms involved at a later date. She agrees and seems excited at the prospect, inviting me to sit in on staff meetings as well.

As we talk, a girl named Leah walks in. Leah and June are here for a meeting with Mary, so after a hug hello from Leah, the three retreat back into Mary's office.

I realize that my half hour has been over for almost ten minutes. It will be interesting to conduct research on this organization, I think. My deep involvement with encounter may cause certain complications, but having connections with this community has already broken down some barriers to research.

The Emerson et al reading says that ethnographers will never have a native view because their stay is limited. But here, everyone is in transition. Some of the students whose art even now hangs on the walls of the campus house have graduated or moved, and new faces are always emerging.

Perhaps it is true of University studies in general, maybe just university students, or particularly student organizations, but the level of acceptance despite a brief stay makes observation seem much more natural if one is willing to participate as well.

**Sculpture Project Observation** (Assignment #24/ M14: More Data)

Again, I chose to photography as a source of data (see attatched images entitled "sculpture project"). Artists (in ISU's program as well as non art students from ISU and Heartland who still work with art) contribute to a substantial subculture at encounter. Encounter even holds an art show each semester to support students' work and to foster this subculture as an important source of "community".

Maggie, an active member of encounter, is a student in the art department. For an assignment in a sculpture class, Maggie went around collecting furniture, books, and even food which had been discarded (an activity celebrated by many at encounter an referred to as "dumpster diving", "freegan hunting", and "freecycling") and assembled her collection in an alcove between the CPA and Centennial West. It was constructed to give the feeling and atmosphere of a living room, complete with furniture, coffee table reading, and free bagels. Maggie spent the day sitting in her constructed "living room" and inviting passersby to have food, sit for conversation, and take any of the furniture they
wanted.
Though this 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 members of encounter. 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.
While I was there, two people who were unaffiliated with encounter that joined in the conversations about Christianity either were invited to come to encounter the following night, both agreeing.
This is evidence of the fact that the subcultures of encounter (longboarding, denny's, music and art) are crucial to its larger appeal and it's ability to bring in newcomers.

**Interview Transcripts:**

**9-24-07 Zach E.**

**9-24-07 Zach E.**
Zach is a student in his early twenties. He has been attending encounter for about a year and a half, since he transferred to ISU. As I interview him, he is peeling away layers of newspaper he has attached to a canvas and moistened - he is making a gift for a fellow artist at encounter, June.

*K: How would you define community?*

Z: Define community? Basically... just people living together and geographically close to one another. Living on the same economic system maybe.

*K: So would you say then that I'm in community with my creepy neighbor across the hall?*

Z: Yes.

*K: In a way that's just as significant as, or perhaps more significant because of physical closeness than, my community with you?*

Z: In certain areas. Like when it comes to dealing with like, your practical life, like dealing with your apartment stuff, you would be dealing more with your weird neighbor. But on an emotional level, I would say you were more in community with me, because I’m your friend.

*K: How do you think encounter functions as a community?*

Z: Things like that, like encounter function because they... Firstly they acknowledge that they are in community together. Now whether people act accordingly or not, it's just... they have this standard of wanting to live in
community. And what that means I think is being somewhat dependant on each other, being able to support each other, whether it be financially, emotionally, spiritually. Yeah, just walking through life with them, with someone else. That would be community.

K: So would you say that your friends, in essence, make up your community?

Z: They make up a community. I think that there are different, you live in different communities. Like I said, you have a community here at your apartment complex, um, you live in a community with other people who live here. You have a community at encounter, you have a community in your class that you’re doing this paper for that you talk to in class, and yeah it’s... there are just different communities and there are different levels... your family is a big community on your life — its kinda just like subcultures within a bigger culture, this idea of community. Like we live in an American community but there are different subcultures within that, within that united states, so its just, there’s not just one community that you belong to, I don’t think.

K: One of the things you mentioned about, like, about the value of community was providing certain support, like emotional support, financial support, etc. Um, what community do you feel most supported by in kind of a day to day sense?

Z: My family. Um, I know a lot of people don’t have that, but I’ve always felt really close to my family. Even though they’re not within my physical space — they’re not living with me in my apartment or anything, but I know that if something were to go wrong, they would be the first people that I would call for help.

K: What about [your sister] Ruth? Has it been different at ISU knowing that you have family here?

Z: Um, no. I get along with my sister, but we hang out in different circles. But its because the people she hangs out with, they weren’t really at encounter, so... and we have different personalities, so we’re gonna hang out with different people.

K: So who’s in your circle then?

Z: My circle of friends?

K: Um-hmm.

Z: I would say, up to this point, close friends that I would like look to for help would be (lists several members of encounter, many of them on leadership team).

K: So all of them go to encounter. Did you meet them through encounter?
Z: Yeah, it’s funny, because my sister brought me to encounter even though she didn’t really hang out with the people. Well, she does now. Just because me and Jake are very similar so he hangs out with the same kind of people I hang out with and Ruth’s brought along because she’s married to Jake. That’s just how it works.

K: So how do you think you got involved with friendships at encounter when Ruth, who brought you there, didn’t connect with people there in the same way?

Z: It had to be small groups and just people through people. Because I got to know Mike because I was in his small group and I’m a transfer student so I was older than all the other new people, freshmen.

K: Right.

Z: So I connected with him, just being the same age and having gone through similar experiences, and then he knew people he hung out with and I got to know them. It’s funny, because people that I hang out with now, like Jude – I didn’t know Jude at all my first year here. We met, or we started talking to each other like mid-second semester the second year that I was here and good friends – it’s a slow process of investment in people.

K: Do you think that’s a large part of encounter or more a side effect of encounter?

Z: It’s a side effect. It’s hard just because of the college lifestyle because basically you have probably between... like five years. Most people go to school for five years now, but to build relationships with these people before you’re gone – its such an unpermanent place to be that its, sometimes its hard to want to invest in people because you know you’re gonna be gone in a little bit, so it’s like – what’s the point?

K: Mm-hmm. So why did you end up investing in people?

Z: It’s just, umm, I think its something you need to do to live a fulfilled life. Something you need is human contact. People go, I mean, crazy if they are not interacted with as a child, or kept by themselves, or stick by themselves, its just, not a healthy state to be in. If you’re a Christian you understand that through the creation story and the creation of eve. Not just so much of a woman to a man, but just as people to people. There needs to be – man was not made to be alone.

K: How has that story, and your faith affected how you view relationships and how you view community?

Z: It’s changed a lot over this year. I want to invest in people, but it’s a struggle – it’s a constant struggle to want to, because sincerity is such a big deal when it comes to building relationships. And its probably my biggest fear when it comes to starting a new relationship, is like if I give all I have to this relationship, is this
person gonna do the same? Are they sincere about getting to know me or do they just wanna know like a thirty second life story and then move on, kinda like a handshake? I learned a lot about this when I was over seas this summer doing missions work and getting to know people and they call it uh, relationship missions, relational missions, because you cant – in Europe now its post-church, post-missions and so people don’t really care about the church and so unless they know you they’re not gonna care about what you have to say. So building relationship is the starting point. They have this model... they say its like a three year process. Relationships aren’t cheap things, Community isn’t built by itself, its something that you need to invest in, and you will get burnt sometimes by people who don’t take it seriously.. yeah.

K: But it sounds like your primary motivation.... Comes from what exactly?

Z: Um, my motivation to have community is partly just a desire to have friends, to have a sense of belonging. Honestly, I think a person finds so much contentment when then can invest in and help out another person, not just because as a Christian I believe God commands us to help others, but just as - I think everyone can find that contentment no matter who they are or what religion they believe. That helping others and getting to know others is healthy, and... it’s just a good thing.

Mark Johnson 11.1

Mark has been the campus minister at encounter for twelve years. We are sitting in his office on the overstuffed couches which take up most of the room; meetings with students are not uncommon during Mark’s work day. He does not hesitate to sit down with me for almost an hour to discuss encounter.

K: Encounter is what, exactly?

MJ: Encounter is a campus ministry, specific to college students, with a purpose of bringing them into a life-long encounter with Jesus. How’s that?

K: That’s fantastic.

MJ: (chuckles)

K: It sounds like you’ve said that a few times.

MJ: well, it is kind of on the cusp of what we do all the time.

K: How does that mission or call relate to all the individual stuff, you know, come into like Tuesday night worship, and everything else?

MJ: um, well everything, I think everything encounter embodies, if its gonna be improving our encounter with Christ, it, 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. The best way to meet Jesus, I think, is through other people, and if we are going to be true to the name “encounter”, we need to encounter “us”, we need to encounter people, so uh.. and so most of what we do is a big excuse to let God interchanger, or encounter each other, and have people encounter each other. So at the beginning of the year we have a lot of, as you know, we have a lot of social events and a lot of cook outs and things of that nature, and its funny – like every year I feel like I’ve got to be really clear with my students about saying “remember that at successful cookout isn’t that everyone got fed, its that everyone got connected” – everything is an excuse for relationships. And then um, we just kind of, as time’s gone on, we’ve just tweaked out, and realized that everyone’s got a different, different purposes that need to be fulfilled – many purposes underneath the big purpose - and so our large group’s meeting’s purpose I think is to encounter God himself, and um, to bring everyone together to just meet Jesus. And so that’s why we, in that meeting we turn the lights off, we uh, we try to take - eliminate the distractions of people around us so that we can focus upward, focus on Christ, and focus on his meeting with us, and that’s why there’s a lot of worship, because I think worship easily passes us into that other zone, that other dimension of where God is – I think that spiritual barrier is sometimes hard to break, and music is one of the big ways obviously we can break through into that, and so that’s why -

K: And by “worship” in that sense, you mean like worship music?

MJ: Yes, that’s good to point out. Because, I think by definition there’s a lot of different ways we can worship, but yeah – I’m talking about worship there – Tuesday night is music. So there’s a lot of music (K:mm-hmm), um... and try to, to do our best to help people pass through that veil from the carnal world to the spiritual world. To meet with God. So, there’s, there’s something kinda powerful about doing that with 150 other people as opposed to by yourself, too, so that’s the uniqueness of a Tuesday night. Um, and through the week we have small groups, and those small groups, their purpose is to really inter-interact and be like a family – we call them family groups for that reason – so that we can, we can cry with each other, we can laugh with each other, we can be at each other’s events that we might be a part of or whatever, just so that there are support systems. And again we want to make God be a part of that, we use- we use scripture as a springboard, but many times if the scrip- again the purpose there isn’t that we get through the bible study, the purpose is that we are connecting under the name of Christ and that we are supporting each other. And sometimes we have to scratch the bible study because someone’s going through a hurting time, and that’s – that’s a priority. So, I think that’s.. um, that’s the purpose of the small groups. But I think if tha- I think if you don’t do the bible study, then it, it kinda just becomes a.. it loses a lot of it’s drive and a lot of purpose, so we need tha- we need to have a healthy, a healthy balance of staying on task, but also not being too, too strict in following some format. Um, another outlet that we do a lot of is mission trips of service. And I think we, I think we’re starting to get a little better with service, emphasizing that within our groups, small groups, that they would find ways to reach out to serve the community, um so that again our interaction is not just with ourselves, but that there’s interaction with people in the community to spread this love of God’s to people that are not rubbing
shouders with us. So there’s that, there’s that aspect, uh, and if you want me to I can explain a little bit of how that… (K:nods) in my mind I see a model given to us in Acts 1:8, where Jesus says be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, outer parts of the earth. And so I, I try – I don’t know how effective we always are, but I try to have a balance there of us being uh.. service minded locally, and then kind of as the sphere goes outward we would continue to be um, a little bit more outreaching all the way to our big emphasis in our ministry which you know about is the Philippines – the outer parts of the earth. Um, and I like to fill in those gaps in between – it’s kinda easy to fill in the what, what’s here in town, what can we serve, and then we’ve also got the Philippines, but those, those mid-range service opportunities are something I like to try to fill in- I was excited I talked to a girl last night and she said “would it be alright if I headed up a mission trip to Portland?” and, umm, so I said “Absolutely!” and uh, so a lot of that kinda just kinda fills itself in, those gaps just kind of fill in as the year goes on...

K: Cool

MJ: Yeah, you probably would like that

K: Yeah

MJ: It’s right up your alley

...MJ: (talks about retreats, as a way to regroup, refresh – battery charging time)
... There’s something about getting in a van and leaving town that bonds people. I don’t know what it is. You can get in a van and drive around this town and nothing happens. But you know you’re leaving town together – there’s a bond. And so we leave town. We try to do that as often as we can. And some of those are with other groups. (elaborates specifics about the fall, winter and summer retreats)

K: (asks about discipleship)

MJ: We hand pick people to be intentional leaders for the school year. And we have this acrostic that we, that we go by. And we are looking for FAT-O people: Faithful, Available, Teachable, and I added the O last year, Others-focused. Like they have to be charged by people a little bit, they have to be people-people to be in that role I think. (talks about why each is important).what we do, is we meet with them on Monday nights at leadership meeting, and they not only head up our leadership groups, our family groups, but they are asked and expected to invest in someone one-on-one with the purpose of that person becoming a giver as well. And, we look at Jesus’ great commissioning call (cites Matt 28:19-2), which includes the phrase “go and make disciples”, so making a disciple isn’t just making someone believe in Jesus, a disciple is not a true disciple until they are making disciples as well – if that makes sense to you (K: mm-hmm). And so we’re looking to find, we are emphasizing that – it’s a, a kind of a key buzz-word that’s going around – however, we don’t want it to become too much of a buzz word because I there that’s there becomes an arrogance that goes with that – If
you say “can I disciple you?” it sounds sort of arrogant, so most of the
discipleship relationships, I believe are happening without the person even reali-
they don’t call it discipleship, and hopefully they don’t even realize that some of
it is intentional maybe until later. They just know that they are cared for and that
they are loved and that they want to be invested in and I think that that’s, that’s
the point.

(asked to clarify the terms bible study/small group/family group)

MJ: Good question. Well, I’d say family groups should be the most accurate of
the terms – that we would be a family. Maybe small group or bible study would
be more descriptive terms as to what we do there. Um, small – small just means
that it’s going to be five to eight people probably, and bible study is part of what
we do. And I think a lot of the term bible study is such a common and generic
term that people use for other ministries, that when people come into our
ministry, maybe we don’t share that term but it just kinda becomes known as the
“bible study time”, and I’m not going to fight that. But it’s probably more
accurate to say family group because we just wanna- like I said before, be family
to each other. And give people what they need on any given night, and that
might mean... last week, um, I encouraged some of our family groups to have a
fun night with their family groups that week, maybe go bowling, maybe we need
to just take a break. Another night, maybe we need to call people out on some
issues that need to be worked on, some nights we need to cry, other nights we
might need to just study, its kind of up to those leader’s sensitivity to God and
the leading of the Holy Spirit to see what that means. And that’s family –
family’s messy. And the neater I try to make this, the more packaged I try to
make this, the less successful they are. We’ve gotta let them be messy, cuz that’s
life.. People are just complicated beasts. So family group is the term I would be
most attracted to.

K: (asks about how encounter meets students’ needs)

MJ: Well, first I’d like to say that I don’t think- I do think that a campus ministry
could be for anyone. I do believe that. However, what makes campus ministry
beautiful is that no one makes anyone come here. Just about every other
ministry I’m aware of has that element of “my mom made me” or “my wife
dragged me” or something like that. And, and so it is a refreshing thing for me
whenever I preach to this crowd to know that everyone’s there because they
want to be. And I think that there’s very little I can do to try to meet all this
diversity that’s out there, to meet all of their needs. And like you said, you’ve got
frat people here and sports people here and library dwellers and it’s just a
diverse group, and and its – the only thing I know to do is to put up a sign that
says Jesus or encounter – and by the way we’ve intentionally made that generic
so that people wouldn’t feel like it’s affiliated with a particular denomination,
because in that case they feel like they don’t fit – and so we’re trying to keep it
generically open for all people regardless of their background to come to. And
like I said before, we want to be going to people and meeting them on their
needs and serving and being Jesus to people, but I feel like there also has to be
something to draw them in, too. And so encounter, that’s another reason we do
Tuesday nights at nine, so that we can hopefully be something to all people. And it’s interesting to see each night, such a diverse group of people that come together under the same umbrella. And that won’t work on two accounts: a) if the meeting stinks and b) if we don’t have people who are willing to invite people in. And I have found that if we really are trusting God- a lot of it’s trust. Because I mean how do you get quality people? Quality people that want to – when I saw quality, I think everyone’s quality, but meaning people that are extroverts that are going to try to draw other people in – how do you get those people other than you gotta, gotta have something quality there for them to want to come to. And so it’s just a, it’s a cycle, and it’s hard because I’ve been in a position where I, I jus- I’m always frustrated with this - I drive around campus and I see thousands of people, and I look in their eyes and I’m like, That looks just like someone else I know, that looks just like someone else I know, and I know that they would benefit so much from coming. However, you can’t make them come, and how do you get them to come? If I go out and beat a drum and hold up a sign, it just, it repels more than it draws. And so all I know to do is to do the best we can to provide a quality meeting and allowing people to invite – encouraging people to, based on that, be extroverted and invite people in.

K: (Talk about community, asks for definition/clarification)

MJ: Well, I got this picture in Acts 2 that I love. I don’t think we ever fully grasp it, or achieve it, but it’s sort of out there as a community that once existed when Jesus first sent the holy spirit and this church popped out. And it’s, it’s in Acts 2 where it says, or maybe it’s Acts 1, but it says “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”. And I like those four things: the apostles’ teachings, which would be scripture, which I kinda feel like we’re circling around, whether it’s in our large group meeting or small group meeting; the fellowship, which is the people, you know; and to the breaking of bread, and I think that term there, could mean communion, but I think it might be more than that, I think it means, I think it refers to a lot of just eating together and being with each other. And hopefully that kind of thing is happening with our small groups, and you know... food is a big part of community; and then to prayer. And uh, what do I want to see out of that? I think that I’d like to see our community feel like we have a common purpose. And to wake up in the morning and be like “Hey - are you fulfilling the purpose that we’re called to?”, and that would be to bring people into that lifelong encounter – are you helping do that, are you doing that, are you following Christ today? And we can call each other out based on those kinds of things. But I also, I also see how diversity, the bigger the ministry gets – there’s a lot of diversity. There’s a lot of different kinds of people here. There’s a lot of, a lot of different make-ups, a lot of different values on what, what they view as an important part of their life, or what they view as a fun night – So I think it’s probably a reminder to me that we need to be a little bit more intentional about continuing to restate our purpose of bringing people into that lifelong encounter with Christ.

(K briefly recaps interview)
K: Is there anything else about encounter that you think I should know, that you think I should include that we haven’t touched on?

MJ: I’m sure there is, I’m sure of it. (pause). Well, I would like to say that there is, there is a uniqueness to campus ministry that I am particularly drawn to. And I don’t remember if I told you this before, but I remember hearing that ministry out in California that was called the Coastlands. (describes a ministry in which there was no advertising, and thus all newcomers were invited by people directly, and all members were asked to leave after five years so that people value their time there because it is limited and they are being developed as leaders. Mark says this is much like campus ministry because of the turnover). It would take an amazing call from God to shift me out of campus ministry because I, I just see so much potential here and I think people take notes differently than they do anywhere else because they know this is a training ground for the rest of their lives – And I’m able to see life change happening in huge ways, and to see growth in people in leaps and bounds. And I think other preachers are probably jealous of me and I wouldn’t blame them cuz it’s just the nature of where I’m at.

Luke Matthews – 10/18/07

Luke has been with encounter since he and his wife Mary were hired in 2004. Luke's most visible role in encounter is coordinating and leading worship on tuesday nights, where he heads an otherwise student worship band. He also meets with certain students weekly for "discipleship" and handles many administrative tasks.

The day I speak with him, I have actually come to interview Mark. However, something came up, and Luke is more than willing to give me an interview on the spot in his office.

K: [paraphrase the mission of encounter]

LM: [every church has its own, but basically they are all the great commission. Ours is trendier because it’s aimed at college students, but it’s basically the same...] but with a focus on discipleship.

K: how do you define discipleship?

LM: [...] life transfer from one student to another. Very relational. [Our ministry] doesn’t look like street evangelism, it looks like building relationship - ( Phone rings, recording stops)

2nd Recording begins

LM: [not just transfer between students, but also from staff]... long term so, grinding, family process..... [all campus ministries are sort of the same, just marketed differently. Encounter is less] program focused stuff and more
relational focused stuff so that that life transfer can happen

K: What do you mean by “less program focused”?

LM: I mean that all our time and money isn’t spent on our large group meetings. Like, we don’t even really have a budget for our large group meetings. Um, not that we don’t want them to be done well, but like if you asked me how our ministry was doing, the first thing that came- comes to my mind would not be how many students we are getting at our large group meetings once a week or how flashy those are.

K: What would it be?

LM: uh, small groups would be a big one for us. Um, and unfortunately that’s one of the only ones that’s measurable, because most of the things that – if I think of how our ministries are doing – are difficult to measure: Life change, hove I had a lot of conversations with people this week where I think God’s really doing things in their life – which you can’t really put on paper very easily. [Which makes it more difficult.] Because you can’t really write a newsletter about intangible life change. But you get those glimpses too. So I don’t know.

That’s the flavor of discipleship, where I feel like it’s... I don’t feel like age matters, I don’t even feel like it matters how long you’ve been a Christian, everybody’s just kind of in a different spot in their journey, and so the question is how do we prod each other on depending on where we’re at? And that may be freshman spurring on a senior, or it might mean a freshman spurring me on, or it might be the other way around, but I feel like we all do that for each other.

K: [those are pretty intimate relationships – so how do you encourage the formation of those relationships despite high turnover and people not knowing one another, etc?]

LM: Um, well – I think... I’m 33 years old now, Mark’s a little older, so there are a handful of relationships where we can do that, but most of the time we’re too old, I think, to - and there – we can’t hire enough staff to do – cuz when you’re talking about transfer, that’s real relationships you’re talking about there, that doesn’t happen with fifteen people, you can’t, there’s a limited amount of people you can pour into and I mean you and me and everybody else, it’s all the same. So for us it was originally setting up a leadership team where we originally poured into people with the hopes that that, again, [they would invest in others and so on]. So, kind of our hope is that everybody is a leader, but we have a group that kind of initiates that in the small groups to make sure that that’s – that theres at least one person with fire and vision that’s going into each group. So we as a staff dump into that group with the hopes that it has more far reaching affects in campus than we could ever imagine., you know?

K: [what’s the normal path for a student to get connected to encounter?]

LM: We’ve talked about that before – we talk about “Joe Student” sometimes, like average college student and how he comes into contact with Jesus and how
our group fits into that, so... In my experience, there are usually a couple different ways that Joe Student becomes involved, and one of the is they are looking for, they are actively seeking a group like ours. Either because they’ve gone to church in the past and they know that that’s important, or they just like – and that could be anything, where they really have a great relationship with Christ, or they just have a habit of going to church, um, but they’re actively seeking us, and a lot of those students, at the beginning of the year are pretty easy to attract because you throw out publicity – and they’re looking for publicity, they’re looking for websites. So, you have a website and publicity, and uh, so that that’s done uh, I don’t know, I guess through marketing, I guess because those people are looking for a place to be involved, and we don’t – we do almost all of that advertising at the beginning of the year [and people respond to that throughout the year, but mostly at the beginning]. And beyond, I feel like after the first few weeks, the other Joe Student that comes into our ministry comes into contact with somebody here: through classes, through work, through whatever, lives next to him, um, or gets invited to one of the small groups, they’re on the sports team together and they get invited to come to one of the small groups, and they weren’t necessarily looking to get involved in anything, but there is kind of a hunger spiritually, they see that through somebody else – some of that life transfer starts happening and they kinda see, they kinda see Jesus through that, so – so one of them I think they’re kind of finding us, and one of them I think our students are just out there hopefully, finding them. I’m sure there are other ways too, but I think those are the two most popular.

K: [once they come on Tuesday or even to small group, how do they get more deeply connected?]

LM: The easy thing to do is to teach that from the front and just hope it catches on, which – sometimes it does [... but that doesn’t always happen, and that’s why community is so important, so that people are drawn in through friendships] if you look at our calendar at the beginning of the year, almost everything that we did was social. I mean we – not that we didn’t – we had prayer times and worship as well, but a lot of it was internally focused. So you have people going to six flags or going canoeing or having a cookout, which is kinda geared around establishing relationships, just learning each other’s names and figuring out who each other is, and um, what we’re working to, hopefully, is that by the end of the year, our calendar will look much more externally focused – there’ll be a small number of social gatherings and a lot more in the way of uh, service and external outward, people serving together – so you go from people talking together, which is great, I mean that should never stop, but a high – it should go high social and low service to low social and high service, by the end of the year is our goal, that the groups will catch that. And as they do that, they get into each other’s lives. Um, Teaching is good, but it won’t reach as far as your brother or sister in Christ seeing something in your life and calling you out on it, or encouraging you in something you’re doing right. Uh, I’m kind of an introvert, and even I get how much I need that kind of external influence in my life, people around me saying hey this is good, and hey this isn’t, calling me to something higher, so, um... Program, from a program perspective, all we can really do is teach it. But we’re hoping that the model, if I can use that word, that that will
happen within the family, within those family conversations. Those people getting into each other’s lives. And there no way that – people can do whatever they want, so there’s certainly no way to enforce that that happens, so, but... I hope that the more connected in family that looks like the less people are slipping through the cracks.

K: [what is the main purpose of the large group?]

LM: teaching is a part of that. Corporate worship is a part of that. Um, we think that its healthy for believers to learn together. Scripture certainly teaches that it’s healthy for us to get together and praise God together. Um, and there is – it’s a different kind of community there, but it’s a sense of community there as a large corporate gathering too, when you see everybody in the same place doing the same thing. That’s basically it – it’s to get together and worship together and do something corporate and to see each other in a, a bigger scale, you know? And I have – I know, it happens weekly because weekly works, but it could be bi-weekly or monthly, as far as I’m concerned, cuz I think like IU said, in the way we’re doing things, hopefully that kinda takes a backseat to those smaller groups that are in each others’ lives. But there’s, I think that there’s a benefit to being part of a larger group because there’s an energy there, and you get to feel some of the momentum of what you’re involved in, so I think that’s what our large group does.

K:[anything else to add?]

LM: Maybe just that all I see us, all I see this ministry as is kind of a skeleton for God and the students to put the flesh on and figure out what it looks like. And it’s just, uh, I mean I love this place, it’s part of my investment, but it’s, I really feel like what we’re doing is focused toward the kingdom. Like, toward preparing people for what they’re going to be locked into later. I mean we’re got at best four years – I mean with some students it can be longer, but with most students its actually probably closer to two, and uh, and so I feel like we’re constantly – it’s temporary. You know, everything that we’re doing is temporary. Cuz you know students move on. So, you know – I love that aspect of it, cuz I feel like if we had to shut our doors today, in two or three years no one, no one on campus would even remember. You know, there’s a pretty short memory here. But in a lot of ways – and that causes a lot of frustration in trying to train leaders, and in trying – cuz, you know, it, its – you do it new every semester, every year. But at the same time I love that, cuz it helps me remember that we’re sending people out – you know, everybody’s leaving here and we have a chance to kind of light a fire under them while they’re in here, for the short time that they’re here. So it’s kind of a blessing and a curse in campus ministry, that we have just a little handful of time, and to see what God does through that. And if He does chose to use some other tool to do that, that’s all encounter really is – it’s not the best tool, but I think that it has a unique voice and in some of the students God has brought through our doors. I have no idea Where He’s taking us – we could be quadruple our size in four years or we may not exist, and I’ve learned to be content that whatever stage we’re in is where God has us.
Interview with Mary Matthews November 14, 2007

Mary Matthews is a part time staff member at encounter, though any heavily involved student will tell you that she works more than part time. Other responsibilities limit her time in the office, however, and while most of my interviews have been scheduled no more than 24 hours (or sometimes 5 minutes) in advance, I had to plan two weeks ahead to meet with Mary.

She apologizes when we finally meet for being so busy, and makes it clear that student needs are a high priority for her. I sit in a hot pink chair in her office as we talk:

K: (blah, blah, blah...) Can you tell me why encounter needs a paid staff and what it does?

MM: Um, Well, Mark. Mark is, his main responsibilities, main roles through teaching. Here he would be considered – we consider ourselves a team, but if we were to put somebody in charge, it would be him. Um, he would be the director; I guess would be the right word to use if we had to give him a title. Um, but that would be his main thing that he does, is teaching.

And Luke... we all have a lot of really random tasks, but I would give Luke the title of worship...guy (laughs), leader, director, pastor, whatever word you want to use. Um, uh, so that would be his main focus...

...though I feel like so much of their time is spent doing other things even though that would be what their job is um, but they do a lot of meeting with students, they disciple the majority of our male, uh, bible study leaders, which involves a one on one meeting or a one on two depending, so...

And myself, I’m extremely part time, so the majority of my time – all of my time, is spent in meetings, um mostly discipling our female leaders, and I have to meet in groups of three and four because of my time, which stinks. I wish I could do better than that.

But um, the reason for paid staff, I think, uh, more than anything, consistency. Um, having consistent faces here every year who can hold down traditions, who can, um, be the go-to, be the constant, be um, be adults, I guess, the uh, the experienced ones.

K: mm-hmm

MM: Cuz we kinda gathered everybody together and prayed that (???) ministries that are student lead have a tendency to fizzle out and change and morph a lot more. Which in some ways is good. But in other ways I think, having a consistent face and a consistent ministry flow year to year helps to, helps students, because most people want to know what they are getting themselves into year to year. So,
that would be it...

K: And as far as administrative stuff, that just gets...

MM: Um, I would say Luke does most of that, um, he organizes well, the finances, and he does a lot of paperwork and that kind of stuff, he is definitely more administrative than Mark and I are, we are way more people-focused, I think, more than task–oriented. Not that it, it’s not that we’re not both, but if you had to [??] administrative, it would be Luke.

K: And so you’re more, your job is more relational, people oriented.

MM: Mm-hmm.

K: [blah, blah, blah...] You’re considered the relationship guru of encounter, and every once in a while you do speak at the large groups, and a lot of times that’s, that has to do with relationships, and I know that’s one of you passions – how does that affect your role in encounter?

MM: um, that’s kind of a hard question, because I feel like, I feel like my passions do lie in that area – in mentoring relationships.

K: mm-hmm.

MM: And I’m thankful to be in campus ministry because it is a place to do that because so many relationships are starting off, and engagements are happening, and that’s normal – for 18 to 22 year olds to find the person they want to spend the rest of their lives with. But in my role here I feel like that’s limited. I feel like I don’t have a lot of time to do what I’m passionate about, which is really hard for me, being that – being with the girl leaders. I do get to do some of that with those that are dating, but it’s hard too, in that they aren’t all – and if you’re not, you don’t really want to sit with those who are and listen to them talk about it. Girls are just that way (laughs), I would be the same way. Um, so I feel like with those, my discipleship meetings, it is mostly focused around um-most of them are “how are you doing? What’s going on? How can we be praying for you?”, kind of – because they are small group leaders, they don’t really have the same opportunities as a small group member would, really sharing and being prayed for, so I kinda treat our time as that – what’s really going on, um, and we talk about the bible studies, and maybe some difficulties or things that are going on there, and I help them through some of that. So that’s the majority of what my time is spent doing. Um, I would like to see some of that change, you know?

K: mm-hmm

MM: Cuz I feel like I’m kinda stifling some of the passions that God has given me, and I don’t have time for them. So I’d like to see a shift happen where I can invest more - especially since we’ve got more and more people dating and getting engaged, um – it makes me crazy, I wanna say, “You can’t leave and get
married yet – I haven’t done anything! Come back!” (laughs). So, I don’t know – we’ll see. I’m hoping to make some changes.

K: So, okay, so as of right now, it sounds like it’s mainly providing support networks

MM: Mm-hmm

K: So that’s a huge – it seems like a huge theme at encounter (notes importance of small groups as support networks). Why is that worth so much of encounter’s time? Why is that so important to campus ministry?

MM: Well, I think that our goal is community. I think our goal is to provide a home away from home. Um, and I think that’s really difficult to do in a large group setting. And if, you know, anyone who is a church go-er in general, if you just go on Sunday mornings, sit through the service and go home, you’re not going to find community. You’re not going to find the friends you’re looking for. It’s going to be really difficult, because you don’t have any sort of investment; you’re just showing up to the meeting and leaving. Um, and those people who are coming to a large group, it’s just- there’s no connection there, it’s really hard to find that, and it takes years. So I think our, our focus is small so that people can find “homes”, so that they can find friends, so that they can find people to walk through life with, to sharpen each other, to pray for each other, um, and I think you can only do that in a small setting. And I think for most churches that are running healthily, that is the heartbeat of their body – the small, the smaller groups. Really focusing on people and [???] about people, we don’t have to be about Tuesday nights in any shape or form. If that’s what it becomes about, then I don’t want to be here (laughs).

K: Community is a huge thing that people talk about a lot. It’s on a lot of the flyers and signs and everything. Could you give me a definition of what community is? I’m gathering a bit from what you said about sharing experiences, but…

MM: It is, it is one of those Christian-ese words that we throw around. There are a lot of those, and they annoy me.

K: (laughs) Yeah, and I’m probably going to ask you to define a bunch of them

MM: (smiles) That’s fine, um – community. I, if I were to describe community for myself, what I would be looking for, and when I would know I have it, it would be knowing that I have a small group of friends who, if I were going through something hard in a day, I know I have these three people to choose from, or whatever the number might be, um, that we’ve got that understanding between each other that I can call you and say “hey – you know what, I’m having a really hard day, could you pray for me? Or do you have any wisdom? Or what – just, I need to vent, even, you know- I don’t need you to say anything, please just let me say this and I’ll hang up and we’ll be done.” Uh, so that is, that is community to me – people who fight for each other’s hearts and understand
each other’s hearts, and know each other will enough to be able to fight for them through prayer, and through um, just being connected.

K: Mm-hmm. And that sounds like something that a lot of, a lot of students coming to a new place would be looking for. Um, so how do you think encounter seeks to provide that to students? Cuz it’s something that kind of seems to happen organically, um, but how – what are the specific efforts that encounter has to support that?

MM: Um, well, I mean in the beginning of the school year, our efforts are big. To provide events, to provide tings that are inviting, and maybe a little less intimidating to get people to come, um, because we really feel like in the first two, three weeks of college, students are making decisions that are going to make their whole four years- for the most part. Um, and depending on which crowd of friends they find, that really is going to determine what their college career is going to be like. So, we feel like those first few weeks of school are extremely important to pull people in, in a large way. Um, and then, the reason we have a leadership team – we have 20 this year, which is awesome – um, the reason we have them is specifically for that. So we have twenty people we know on a Tuesday night as a staff who have their eyes and ears open to whoever’s new, whoever’s hurting, whoever um, needs a friend. Then in turn we have our small groups. So we have those twenty people who are leading those groups, who are trying to pull people in, whether they’ve signed up or not, our goal the whole year is to get as many people into small groups as we can. And not for numbers –

K: Right

MM: Just, we want people coming on Tuesday nights to feel that connectedness, feel that community, feel that love, feel that warmth. And I think it’s hard to do on a Tuesday night. And granted, I mean, we’re not going to get everybody. And there are going to be people who come to encounter for two or three weeks and then leave, and say “no one ever talked to me, nobody was my friend”. That’s gonna happen. And that’s gonna happen anywhere and everywhere you go, and to some of those specific people it’s gonna happen everywhere they go because that’s their attitude, and they’re looking for it (laughs) you know what I mean?

K: Mm-hmm

MM: So, I mean, despite out best efforts, I feel like, I really feel like our leaders do a good job of that, um. And then when our leaders do a good job, everyone else does a good job, because they see it modeled, and they see how that’s supposed to be.

K (acknowledges that a lot of the processes which encounter aims to encourage have to be organic rather than forced. Asks how encounter can be intentional about such relationships without intruding on natural processes)

MM: (explains that it involves a lot of trust from staff on behalf of students, relates story about drinking issue and how the student leadership solved the
problem without major input from staff – the intentionality is to build up and empower students to be good leaders and make good decisions)... It’s a lot like parenting, really.

K: (asks where, other than encounter, students usually go to seek out support networks)

MM: well, obviously there are other um, church organizations, ministries, um, but I think a big one is the Greek system. Sororities and fraternities – they’re working just as hard as we are for the first few weeks of school, for the same reasons. And um, not necessarily bad. Um, I think there are a lot of good things that come out of the Greek system too. So,, plus there’s you know, your classes. Some people are just really involved in their major, and whatever groups and organizations they may belong to through that. It may be work, it might be just simply class, just being a student - I go to class and I go home, I don’t have anything outside of my school life. So, I think those are probably the big things.

K: Mm-hmm

MM: I think there’s probably a lot of other things I don’t know about, too (laughs).

K: Um, in terms of Greek life, that’s a comparison that’s been made more than once.

MM: Mm-hmm

K: what do you think encounter, or campus ministry generally, has to offer that Greek life doesn’t?

MM: Mm-hmm

K: Or visa versa

MM: Yeah. Um, I mean, I think – we offer Jesus. (pause)

K: that’s cool

(both laugh)

MM: The Greek system doesn’t generally do that, upfront anyway, that’s not part of their recruiting. Um, but because of that, because we offer Jesus, I think we have a more real sense of friendship, and a real sense of home. And I’m not – I don’t want to talk negative about the Greek system, cause I believe there are real friendships, but I think that a lot of those friendships are based upon... a lot of superficial things. Um, there’s a lot of dating and drinking things that happen in the Greek system that are messy that don’t generally happen in a Christian organization. Yes, both things are there, and yes people are having sex and yes
people are drinking, and it’s the same kind of stuff, but it’s not promoted, it’s not “what we do”, where I feel like in the Greek system that’s, that’s your weekend. You know, there’s fraternity parties, and that’s what you do with you life, and you have friends who do that with you, but um, so… I feel like we offer Jesus, and that, that’s an umbrella of comfort that you’re not going to find anywhere else on campus.

K: [Universities all over the country continue to promote Fraternities and Sororities to students because it helps them get connected and there are recognized benefits of being such organizations…] Do you think that there are any parallels between what the Greek system offers and what campus ministry offers?

MM: Mm-hmm. I definitely think so, I think we can offer the same types of stability, the same type of, um, - I hesitate to use the word “home”, but... a sorority can provide that for you, they can be your family away from family. So I do think, I do think there are a lot of similarities. I mean you could, taking a lot of things out, call us a type of fraternity or sorority, and I know that there is a Christian fraternity, Chi Alpha, that’s out there, um, I mena, it’s the same, same type of concept. But I feel like we, um, because we have Jesus, we can offer the counseling aspect maybe, that um a frat or sorority is not going to. We can offer something that’s real, and can be taken away with them. And I fee like a lot of our students.... A lot of our students coming in are church, churched kids. And that’s, that’s just the way it is, and it’s gonna be that way. It’s not like the first week of school we’re gonna get 200 students who’ve never been to church before, that’s not gonna happen. They’re gonna go, and they’re gonna drink and they’re gonna try all that out because they’re got their first time freedom, and I understand that – I mean why wouldn’t you? I you don’t know any different, um… (pause)

K: (rambles…) [any thing else to add?]

MM: Um, I think – I mean I’d just like to tell you why I love campus ministry so much. I think that might, might… I don’t know. I, I mean I went – I grew up in the church, and went to junior college and then went to Eastern Illinois and was involved in campus ministry there, met my husband there, and we’ve been doing ministry for ten years. So I obviously have some love for it, or I wouldn’t - I definitely wouldn’t be doing this with my life if I didn’t like it, cause it’s a lot of time and it’s a lot of.. a lot of emotional stress, really. Because you take on, you take on students’ lives, which is good – I mean that should, that should be happening. But the things that, the thing I love most about campus ministry would be that um, for somebody like me – and a lot, most people are like me, I would say 80% of the students who walk through our door are gonna be my same story. Um, I grew up in the church because that’s what we did. We went to church on Sundays um, ask me a little about it and I’d be able to tell you, but that’s just, that’s just what we did. And, was I a Christian in high school? Technically. Would anybody I was in high school with ever know? Probably not. Um, not because I was in the drinking scene – which I don’t know why I wasn’t, God protected me from a lot of things I don’t really understand looking back,
but, I feel like when I went to college, that was the first time it because real to me and I understood, “okay. I’ve gotta make those decisions for myself. This is no longer Mom and Dad – nor do I want it to be” because once you hit college, you don’t want Mom and Dad anymore, you’re trying to figure out “who am I gonna be for the next however many years of my life?” And so I love seeing that, I love seeing the light going on for the first time of, or even just the intentionality of college students. They don’t have to be here. I mean there’s nobody saying “go to church, go do this”. And I love that come here is intentional, I love that they’re passionate, that their love for Jesus is passionate and real, um. Cause you go to the local church, and it is – it’s a routine. It’s a, this is what we do, as a family. And it’s sad. It’s sad that it’s that way there, but there’s an energy here that you’re not going to find anywhere else. And part of it’s the age. But I really think part of that is really just coming to an understanding for the first time even if you’ve grown up in the church your whole life. I don’t think you really get it until you’re on your own, away from Mom and Dad, and you have to decide everything you do everyday for yourself, and what are you going to base that on. So I love that, I love the, the problems that college students deal with. I mean we say this all the time: same problems, different faces. I mean, it is, that is the truth of it. But its, I love it – I love what they’re walking through, and being able to help shape that, and um... I love college students. They drive me crazy sometimes, it’s true (laughs), but for the most part - and when you invest in someone for two to three years and see nothing and then all of a sudden, the change happens, it’s – its pretty cool to watch someone walk in as a freshman and walk out as a senior and see what God’s done in their life, cause it’s, it’s huge. Those four years are, are setting habits for live that, are huge. So it’s fun to see... to see that. Cuz you can definitely tell who’s a freshman and who the seniors are. There’s a big difference (laughs). And it entertains me (laughing). Every beginning – every semester, I’m entertained by the freshman girls coming in and “It’s all about me, me, me, me, me, what I did in high school, everything, blah, blah, cheerleader, dated boys” to “...oh, no one cares about this stuff”.

(both laugh)

K: alright, well thanks Mary, I appreciate it

MM: You’re welcome.

**Jude oct 17, 2007**

It is one in the morning, and Jude and I are standing outside of Denny’s smoking Marlboro Smooths, on a break from studying. He is a computer science major in his senior year, and he is one of many encounter students who are considered "regulars" by the third shift staff at Denny’s. Jude tells me he missed encounter tonight because he was watching Luke and Mary Matthews’s children while they led worship. It is at this point that I break out the tape recorder and ask him some more intentional questions.

K: Why do you attend encounter?
J: Because I feel like we need to be involved in the body of believers.

K: Who is “we”?

J: Christians.

K: alright. So why encounter and not another “body”?

J: I was heavily invested in by one of the key leaders from the get go.

K: Which one?


K: And how did you meet Luke Matthews?

J: I went to encounter one of the first weeks of my freshman year.

K: How’d you find out about it?

J: I got a flyer in the mail.

K: Really? So you got a flyer, and you went to encounter, and you met Luke Matthews. And Luke invested in you?

J: Yeah. He uh, through, at that time the campus ministers were leading small groups and Luke kinda pulled me aside and asked me to get lunch with him, and we kinda chit chatted and we felt like we had a good connection, and so we kept that, that friendship going, and we grew together.

K: Did you join his small group?

J: Yeah.

K: and did you meet anyone else there?

J: Um, for the first semester, almost all of the next semester as well, I really didn’t have any friendships inside of encounter.

K: And, um, where did you form those other friendships?

J: Uh, when I actually became a leader. And thru a, um, one of the retreats – the winter retreat.

K: So did you have friends outside of encounter that first year?
J: Not really.

K: So it was kind of a solitary-

J: - my roommates.

K: mm hmm. So did you get connected to most of the friends you have now through encounter?

J: Yeah.

K: And that was through leadership?

J: Uh, leadership put me in a role to get to know other people.

......

K: What do you think the purpose of encounter is?

J: Um, to, It's a tool that Christians can use to be in fellowship with one another and to learn – to really learn how the body of Christ acts. And that is through fellowship and through the bible studies and in some ways it's a networking tool as well.

K: How do you define fellowship? Like how are fellowship and networking different or similar?

J: I would say fellowship like, um, Christ doesn't call us too... The way that we are built, we are built for relationships. And like, everything needs to be founded on a relationship first. And its very easy to get caught up in just learning about Christ and not learning about each other. And I would define fellowship more as just getting to know each other, and strengths, weaknesses, everything, and just build a core bond with each other. And we have something in common, so we can start with a bond and work from there. Whether it be similar passions we have or life struggles that we've dealt with.

K: And you think encounter does a good job promoting fellowship?

J: Yeah, I would say so.

K: Through what?

J: Um, well the way it's organized, there's a lot of, there are campus ministries, or ministries involved, like, as a whole that like its all about, its really flashy, and its, it makes you feel good, and you go home with a good feeling, whereas I really believe encounter is based more on the call to make disciples. And, um, we don't have a whole lot of flash, but we have a lot of deep relationships within encounter. And like we need to be striving to find more relationships and get
people plugged in. And we get people plugged in whether it be through the small
groups, or service projects – we’re not very good at service projects, but that
doesn’t mean it’s not encouraged – or just by helping out. We have like baking –
like people can bake for after encounter or helping out with like the sound and
everything. Like there’s just different avenues people can get plugged in.

K: What do you think is the most effective part of encounters ministry to get
people plugged in?

J: Um... honestly I think developing relationships. I think that’s the core um of
everything. Like if you develop a relationship with a few different people, um,
they’re gonna be a lot more willing to like, um... well, it’s gonna start off as a
friendship and out of that, like, friends - like friends wanna help each other out.
And through those friendships they will want to get involved in those different
areas that will plug people in.

K: And uh, how do you think encounter fosters friendships best? Is that through
worship on Tuesday nights, is that through small groups, is that through
discipleship with individuals, is it through service...?

J: Small group and discipleship. The, it’s, I think it gets started from the large
group meetings.

Pt. 2

K: Jude, how do you feel about fraternities?

J: I think they have their benefits [frat boy yells “whoo-hoo!” – unrelated to
Jude’s statement]. They do an excellent job of networking inside of their
fraternities as well as outside, like, within the whole – the Greek system as a
whole. Um, unfortunately a lot of those bonds are created through um, some
outside sources, whether it be alcohol or, um, I don’t really know where I’m
going with that. Um, people enjoy suffering together. And, like the initial phase
of fraternities or sororities is like you have to gut it out. And through that you
have to build up bonds. Similar to boot camp. Um, and I think that is similar to
the Christian philosophy of suffering for Christ. And unfortunately in our culture
we don’t have to suffer for Christ. We can say we’re Christian and be done with
it. And I think we miss out on a bond that fraternities strive for, and um, any
time anybody suffers together, there is that bond, because like, they had to go
through crap, and fraternities do that very well.

K: So, why are you not in a fraternity?

J: It’s very... for one it’s expensive. There’s a lot of manipulation that’s involved
[tells story of friend in sorority].... And I don’t want to be part of manipulation
and suffering for nothing.

K: So what do you think encounter has as an advantage over the Greek system in
terms of building relationships?

J: Um, like the whole premise for me within the Greek system is like belonging to something bigger than you. Unfortunately, the Greek system is anything... like its something outside of you that’s bigger than you, but it means nothing. Whereas we, as a body of Christians belong to something bigger than us and we are founded on Christ, and like that is something we can take the rest of our lives and apply to every aspect of our lives. And through scripture it says that like, we, through actively pursuing Christ we can, we will inherit the fruit of the spirit. Whereas the Greek system promises nothing like that.

K: Well, I was talking to Mark earlier and he said that um, one of the goals or missions of encounter is to build kind of a lifelong relationship with Christ and a lifelong connection to the body of Christ. Do you think encounter does that?

J: It opens the door for us. But we don’t force people to. People can be standoffish. But if we worked correctly, I think we would demonstrate those lives, and make – allow people to realize that like this investment is worthwhile. So, yes and no.

Follow up with Jude on November 12, 2007

K: I don’t know if you remember, but as I recall, when I first came to encounter in March of 2005... 2006?

J: 2006

K: 2006. Um, I – you were in the room (apparently) and I asked what encounter was and what it was about. June um, replied in, in the context of a larger answer, I remember, um, I remember something that she said. She said that encounter is about “living life together”. Do you find that’s true?

J: yep.

K: How is that true?

J: Um, well encounter is definitely organized around community and, um, there are, there are things that encounter puts into place that encourage community and, um, encourage living together. For example, I live with two people that I met through encounter, and um... time and time again you hear about that.

K: People literally living together?

J: People literally living together. Along with that, um, in a more um, in a different form of like relationships and um possibly eventually living together, um, a lot of boyfriends and girlfriends um, meet at encounter. Uh, so I think that’s, that’s another example of how encounter encourages living together. (to the recorder, grinning - They don’t live together before they’re married though.
We don’t encourage that.)

K: (laughing) okay. Noted. What about friends, uh, who are not roommates? What does it mean to live life together, or do life together as a community?

J: I think as college students, like we have different activities, like, that we enjoy. And a lot of the-there are a lot of things we do together that have no, um, no ties to encounter but they are with encounter people, like I... have often times gone – there’s disc golfing. With people that I’ve met through encounter. Um, just this past weekend I went and played paintball with a bunch of people from encounter, and then proceeded to play video games until 2 o’clock in the morning that same night. Um, and those are, those are a lot more dynamic – those aren’t things that encounter puts into place, but those spawn out of, um, the original uh, meeting through encounter.

**Paul T of November 12, 2007**

Paul, another Denny’s regular, is a philosophy major at Heartland. He has been attending encounter for several years, and has seen it evolve. We have spoken often about theology and encounter, and i ask him for a formal interview one night during a conversation about spirituality in a postmodern culture.

K: What do you think the purpose of encounter is?

P: I think the purpose of encounter is to provide a place, um, that um.. people can feel welcome, and people can feel, um, safe and create an environment in which living together – er, learning, education on how to live together uh, well, live together, um, in the ways that Christ deemed best, and over all, as more of an overarching purpose, to provide um, a forum for both dispensing and learning how to dispense love.

K: Alright, and um, why do you see a need for those um, for that forum – why do you see a need for that conversation about how to live well?

P: Um, I think that well, for one, it’s been um, up until the last 50 years, 100 years, I don’t know, 200 years – it’s been the single primary (pauses) I feel like I’m talking to the recorder and not to you. I feel like I’m talking to the recorder and not to you.

K: (laughs)

P: Um, it’s been the, it’s bee the philosophical question that’s been answered – what is the good life? What is the virtuous life? Um, and I think that especially in a culture that kind of denies an ultimate good life, um, or at least a good life that is measured by the same standard for you and I as opposed to the good life for only me (**he is referencing his slight disdain for some of the implications of a postmodern society**), um, I think that in, in a culture like that, um, it’s incredibly important to maintain discussion as to what is the good life, what - and since we believe that, um, Jesus has laid out what the best life is, but... um,
[it] lacks details, that are need – that are clearly needed to be worked out in community, then I think that we actually need to do that.

K: So encounter really is just an exercise in learning to live?

P: I think, uh, I think I view encounter as uh... I don’t know. Like, a parking lot where you learn to drive with your dad. Like, I think it’s a safer place than in the world, and um... just on, like a pragmatic level too, um, (pause) the college environment, um, especially now, has a whole lot of things um, that are viewed as doctrinally true, or dogmatically true, such as the pluralistic nature of truth that um, stand against thousands of years of history, and really mess with, um, a person’s ability to pursue truth, because if you don’t really believe that it’s there, then you don’t really have any impetus to pursue it, and I think that it’s really important that in like the formational years of college to um, well, provide a forum who think – for people who think that there’s something a little off with the college environment, and to – and also just maintain a, uh, kind of standing of their ground that: Yes, there’s truth, and yep, we think that revelational truth has importance, and, um..

K: So in that way it’s kind of a safe haven for that conversation about the pursuit of truth?

P: Yeah, and it’s also just a good place to, to grow.

K: Alright, well I know that pursuit of truth is a, is a huge passion of yours, and it’s necessarily a part of discipleship -

P: Yes

K: - and it’s necessarily a part of bible studies and small groups, um... How do you think encounter functions to create the aforementioned “community” and this uh, this um element of networking so that Christian students can get to know one another and interact with one another?

P: I think that most of it happens organically. I think that most of it happens simply – um, some of it you can’t get away from basic psychology and sociology, just like, “like” people getting together, um, whatever you want to pin what causes friend groups and clustering and all that crap, um (aside to the microphone – “your field is not crap”). Um, like, but I think that also, um, I think that also some of it is just um intentionally creating that, um, a lot of it I think is definitely is on the leadership group, um, to create an environment that is not false, um, to work on their own lives so that community is a genuine, genuine desire, so that they are not inviting people into their community because they are supposed to but they are inviting people into community because they desire to live in community with them.

K: Um, So how do you walk that balance between intentionality and genuine
desire for community?

P: I think that lies in two realm: (Offers explanation that the ability to be genuine is a matter of (1) “morality”/integrity, and (2) “spirituality”...) just um, forming your spirit, and your um, inner self in a way with the lord that acts, like, where I want to be somebody um – I want to be somebody who genuinely loves people and seeks to love people, and asking the lord to shape your heart in that way. And from that, it naturally flows out of you.

K: So would you say then that that’s part of the “call” of a Christian life – is, is a community that has some element of outreach to it?

P: Oh, absolutely. Um, I think that um, the message is completely clear. Through [the Apostle] Paul, um, through Jesus, uh... I mean Paul makes uncountable amounts of um, efforts saying “encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24-25)”, build each other up in unity (Romans 12) it’s in the old testament, you know – “how good it is when brothers dwell together in unity” (psalm 133:1). I think that clearly the bible is very obvious in it’s acknowledgement of the social truth that like, we are community oriented creatures, like, we’re not meant to live alone.

K: So when you are inviting other people into encounter, the motivation has a biblical/spiritual basis rather than a, kind of social/functional basis? Or is it both?

P: It’s both. I wouldn’t deny the social/functional basis, but I think the social/functional basis comes from the fact that God created us that way – that the two are intimately linked. If God had not made us social, it wouldn’t be social. (Speaks to the tension between scientific phenomenon and spiritual phenomenon, saying that they are not in conflict but that the former is based in the latter) ... there is that upward call to love beyond your own self interests.

**Phoebe 11.14**

Phoebe is new to encounter. I met her at Maggie’s sculpture project, and after her first night I asked if I could interview her. We spoke briefly in a coffee shop the next day:

K: Last night was your first night at encounter, right?

P: mm-hmm

K: How did you find out about it?

P: Though my friend Maggie who’s an art major, and then I met you that one time, and I was invited to go, so yeah.
K: And you – it seemed like you knew a couple other people there

P: Yeah, um, one of the girls that I’m on exec board with for alternative spring break um, she goes, and I never knew that. And I started talking to her about how she was going to go, and she was like “oh, I go there” and so, yeah.

K: Cool. So you knew some people from alternative spring break, and Maggie’s on that too, right?

P: MM-hmm

K: Cool, so, last time was your first time, um, have you – do you go to any other campus ministries?

P: I really don’t really go to church unless I’m at home, and then it’s like a church service – it’s a little different, so yeah.

K: What made you want to come? Was it just that you were invited, or..?

P: I feel like I, need to like, more spirituality in my life, because I feel like ‘m a spiritual person, but I need to like show it more, I guess, and so I think that a lot of the things that I struggle with would be helped – would be like less hard to handle if um, if I had, if I had better ties to my religion.

K: mm-hmm, okay. And so – I’m sorry, how long have you been a student here?

P: Um, oh my god, two and a half years – it’ll be two and a half years in January.

K: So you feel like you kinda want to connect more with your spirituality, and started meeting some people who went and you were invited, right?

P: Yeah

K: So what was your experience when you went? Was it what you expected, was it different?

P: I like didn’t really know what to expect I think I kind of expected like, a church service – ish type of thing, but it was really good. And the fact that I’m so used to like, like the traditional, like service where you have like communion and you sing from the hymns, and like you say all the different prayers and like all that stuff, so it was like different in that respect. In my church at home we don’t sing like – we’ve never had anyone play like acoustic guitar, it’s always like an organ, and like really old people singing and its like so different –

K: Gotta love Missouri synod, right?

P: (laughs) yeah
K: So you liked it, or…?

P: At least I think that its like a good thing. I don’t think that I would go every single week, but I would go at like, every once in a while, if not like every other week, but I feel like I need a little bit more right now as far as like being there and I need more of like the actual church service – I need to eventually, like graduate – I need to gradually go into that. But it’s a good thing to go, like it got me thinking about things, realizing like, if I was more like religious in certain aspects like my life would be a little bit easier because a lot of the things I take on, I take on because I feel like I have no one else who like can do it, so like that’s not true at al, so...

K: Can you explain a little bit more about how it would be easier if you were more religious? Would it be um, easier knowing that you have God on your side kind of thing, or is it like a community kind of thing, or...?

P: I think it would be easier – like I like, all in all, like I don’t, I wouldn’t do it just for the community, I mean that would be an added benefit, but I feel like I’m very well adjusted here and I have like different groups of friends from different organizations and stuff that I’ve been in, but, I don’t know, I think that like I would help me in like – I get really stressed really easily, and thinking that I have all this stuff to do, and it’s not going to get done, and how am I going to get it done, and like if I just stepped back and was like, okay, well, I’m going to put my faith in God and be like “it will get done, like, I just have to go at the speed I can go at and I can’t get ahead of myself but just like trust that it will happen if it’s meant to happen”. So I think that it would help me not be such an anxious mess sometimes in my life.

K: okay, Um, a lot of what encounter is about in addition to like the big worship and whatever is, you know the small group stuff, and there’s always the different kind of events that encounter’s hosting – like that bowling thing you heard advertised, and a lot of it is about like community, and hanging out and making friends and stuff – is that something that you feel like you kinda don’t need because you’re well established here?

P: It’s not that I wouldn’t be open to that, I think it’s just that, right now, especially because I’m taking on, like, a bunch on new things, um, like I just became a child mentor within the Bloomington normal community, and now I have to do that mural thing, and like I think that I’ve got a lot on my place, and so like I think im nervous about the time commitments because I feel like im so busy as it is already, with like classes and everything a like I just don’t want to jump into something like without any – just like dive in head first – like I feel like I need to like, just – that’s why I think I would go like every once in a while just to like get the idea of it and like be there – cuz like it was a really powerful experience I think, but like I just don’t know if I could make the time commitment of it, so...

K: Then it’s less of this networking thing and more if kind of the spirituality-
P: -like centering myself

K: Okay, cool. Um, I think that's really all I need... is there anything else that you feel inclined to share about your experience, or you know...?

P: I think that like, it was like, cool to go there – it's like a real eye opener as to like how many people like are like – you know what, hey, I think – okay here: I think like it's really a comfortable, like surrounding to be like “I'm really into this” and “I'm really into like, God” and I feel comfortable around these people doing it – like it's really, like cool, because a lot of times its like – oh my god, if you, if certain people find out that you went to church, it'd be lie, you know, like you'd be made fun of or whatever, and that's not really the case now, but there's still like a stereotype there with it, like its really cool because all those people were all - like everyone was in the same position, and everyone was grateful and like it kind of helped to prove that college kids aren’t like just about partying, like – that's why I do alternative spring break, because like, yeah, we have fun, we do whatever, you know, and we are young, and we do make mistakes, but we're not all stupid, and like, you know, we will like go and praise God for an hour on Tuesday nights, and like we will volunteer our spring breaks without alcohol, like we’re not stereotypical, you know – like what the stereotype used to be, and I think that was pretty cool.

K: So there’s kind of a safety there?

P: Mm-hmm. Like I could see where like it would be comforting to like go and have that network, and I would totally love to be a part of that – like right now I have to ease into it, but it’s the – everything was like, people’s relationships were like strong, like, they were like really bonded, like over a lot of things, so...

**Text-based Data**

**From the "about encounter" page of the campus ministry's website:**

Encounter is a ministry to college students at Illinois State University. Our desire is to develop a community that brings students into a lifelong encounter with Jesus. We believe this happens through understanding God in terms of a relationship - that God Himself desires to be in relationship with us. All other spiritual disciplines flow out of that simple concept. The ministry has morphed since its conception.

Encounter found its beginnings in 1968. The first campus minister was David Lang, a well known author and publisher. The group was known at the start as "Christian Collegians." Under David’s leadership, a house was purchased near campus at 300 Normal Ave, near the Bone Student Center - one of the hubs of student life on campus. David’s zeal for college students was easy to see. The following excerpt was published in Lookout! magazine in 1970:
"I stand on the campus and observe the thousands of collegians who are crowding through the halls of learning in quest of tomorrow. They are vigorous, quick thinking, and devastatingly frank. They are sometimes gay, laughing, and care free; sometimes deeply troubled, frustrated, lonely, and guilt-ridden. They have the daring energy to conquer the world, but may lack the maturity and patience to rule it. They are supremely confident but often secretly frightened to face the future. Can this reservoir of energy - physical, mental, spiritual - be released for Jesus Christ? Can the church recapture the imagination of these amazing young adults and challenge them to serve God through their chosen professions? I believe so! I know so!"  

David resigned in 1973 as campus minister and was succeeded by Jim Simkins. Under Jim’s leadership, a building was constructed on the site at 300 Normal Ave. Jim led the ministry for 23 years. He became the pastor of a local church in Normal, IL in 1996.

In ’96, Pete Cocco was hired as the campus minister for the ministry. Pete, and his wife Paulette, had previously spent a year in both Hungary and the Philippines. They moved back to the States to take over the work at Illinois State.

In ’99, the name of the group was changed from "Christian Collegians" to "encounter." In 2000, Jason Sanders was hired to work with Pete. And in ’04, Ben and Joanne Miller moved from Charleston, Illinois to work with Encounter. Ben and Joanne had worked with Eastern Illinois University's campus ministry for six years.

Encounter is not supported financially by Illinois State University. Individuals and area churches send monthly support to ensure that the ministry to college students is sustained. Without their concern, prayer, and financial commitment, the ministry here would cease to function. If you are interested in giving to our ministry, check out our donate page.

Praise God for the stability that He has created in this place - for the thousands of students that have been impacted through this ministry. And for the students we have yet to meet - who will meet Jesus in this place and commit to the relationship He desires. That’s what we’re about.

From the "Connect: Tuesday Nights" page of the campus ministry's website:

encounter [large group]

Our Tuesday night "encounter" is our time as a large group to come together and worship God. We hope to experience Him in a unique way each week using worship, Scripture, teaching, media, or anything else that brings us to a closer understanding of our Father.

There is room for you here. Anyone is welcome. We meet in Capen Auditorium at 9pm every Tuesday. [find us]

Our desire is to encourage you in your faith, and to help you understand God and your spiritual walk in new and fresh ways.

From the "Connect: Small Groups" page of the campus ministry's website:

small groups
Each semester we offer an array of student-led small groups. True community is difficult to foster in a large group setting. Small groups offer a way for a group of people to grow closer together in an intimate setting.

It is our desire that every student involved with encounter be connected with this kind of a small group community!

For the Fall 07 Semester, we have two different guys/girls studies that we're offering, both based on Psalms.

**PSALMS** (Bible Study)
God wants our honesty. Come study some of the most honest prayers Scripture gives us. No previous Bible study experience necessary!

**PRAISE HABIT** (book study by David Crowder)
Worship is far more than voice and melody. Join us as we try to examine what a life of praise really looks like. Cost for this group is $10 (for the book)

If you're interested, drop by encounter on Tuesday nights, or email Jo at jomiller3@yahoo.com

**From the Dean of Student’s Office list of Religious RSOs:**

President: Britany Owen bdowen@ilstu.edu
Advisor: Neil Skaggs ntskaggs@ilstu.edu
Primary Type: Religious

Purpose: A nondenominational ministry that seeks to provide all people with an opportunity to meet and be changed into the image of the Creator.

Website: http://www.isuencounter.org

**From the “get involved” section of the Dean of Students Office page:**

The Dean of Students Office provides numerous opportunities to get involved on campus. *Find Your Way* at Illinois State by getting involved today.

- Fraternities and Sororities: Gain leadership skills and develop strong bonds of friendship - Go Greek!
- Leadership and Volunteering: Make a difference on campus and in your community.
- Multicultural Programs and Services: Expand your horizons and get involved with activities pertaining to cultural interests and concerns.
- Registered Student Organizations: Find the group that’s right for you, or start your own!
- Student Government Association: Make your voice heard on campus.
- Trips and Retreats: Meet new people, develop new skills, and have fun! The Dean of Students Office offers a variety of trips and retreats, including Alternative Spring Break, Leadershape, and the Civil Rights Movement Trip.
University Program Board (UPB): Got a great idea for an event on campus? Or, just want to meet new people while having fun? Join a UPB committee.

**Questions to ask when considering joining a registered student organization**

- Determine the goals and objectives of the group and what affiliations it may have with off-campus organizations.
- Figure out what commitments are expected of you.
- Find out the financial obligations are, if any.
- Will membership mean isolation from family and non-member friends?
- If the group is of a political or religious nature, is it tolerant of other opinions and beliefs and does it match your interests?
- Will involvement enhance or deter your academic and career goals?

**Fraternities and Sororities**

Looking to get involved at Illinois State? Then GO GREEK! Joining a Greek organization is an excellent way for you to be an active part of the campus community and Find Your Way at Illinois State. You'll gain valuable leadership skills, gain access to scholarships and other academic support networks, participate in community service, and develop strong relationships through the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood — all unique to members of Illinois State Greek organizations.

**Greek Recruitment**

Joining a Greek organization is one of the best decisions a student can make while attending Illinois State. If you're interested in joining a Greek organization, follow these steps to find your way at Illinois State!

**What is a fraternity or a sorority?**

A fraternity is a group of men or women bound together by friendship, brotherhood or sisterhood, and common goals and aspirations. Women's fraternities are most often referred to as sororities. The members that form the fraternity share their friendship, efforts, and knowledge. Together these members learn and grow and make the fraternity strong. Their common experience builds ties that last a lifetime. This forms a brotherhood or sisterhood among the members, which helps to develop strong and creative leadership that leads to success.

Though there are many different fraternities, they all share common founding principles that are of interest to any college man or woman. Fraternities endeavor to enhance your educational experience by emphasizing intellectual, interpersonal, and social development. The ideals of lifelong friendship, sound education, campus and community service, and social interaction are what fraternity members strive to live by every day.

**Why do people join fraternities and sororities?**

Social opportunities, philanthropic projects, community service, tradition, career networking, and becoming part of an international organization are all reasons mentioned for becoming part of the Greek community, but the one cited most often by members is the sense of brotherhood/sisterhood. After all, you don't have to join a fraternity or sorority to
have a great social life in the University. You don't have to pay dues to a Greek letter organization to volunteer or raise money for a cause. You don't have to belong to the Greek community to acquire the personal development and study skills to succeed at the University. The element of brotherhood/sisterhood is nonetheless a difficult attribute to convey to men and women interested in joining the Greek system. It is a feeling of togetherness, support, and teamwork. It is companionship, personal discovery, challenge, and awareness.

Joining a Greek organization is one way to make Illinois State seem smaller, friendlier, and easier to handle — it gives you a place and people to count on. Fraternities and sororities endeavor to enhance your educational experience by emphasizing intellectual, interpersonal, and social development. The ideals of lifelong friendship, sound education, campus and community service, and social interaction are what Greeks strive to live by every day.

**Will Greek membership affect my grades?**

Academic achievement is a priority for all Greek organizations. Many organizations enforce grade point average requirements and offer study sessions, tutoring, and other programs to assist members to achieve their potential. Since the Greek chapters are composed of men or women from different years, with many different majors, and diverse interests, you can always find some senior members who have already completed the courses you are taking and therefore can offer advice on content and testing.

Students who take advantage of the academic opportunities available and properly balance their time between academic and extra-curricular pursuits will find that Greek membership will enhance their academic performance. Several studies have consistently found that fraternity and sorority members tend to be significantly more likely to graduate from their program and report more satisfaction with their university experience than for unaffiliated students.

**Is there a cost to join a Fraternity?**

Given the benefits provided, Greek membership is a bargain. However, students should consider the costs in planning their personal budgets. Dues vary from chapter to chapter because of size, insurance and tax assessments, national fee structures, etc., but typically dues range from as little as $200 to upwards of $500. Most chapters also offer a variety of payment plan options. Students also should be aware that there may be one-time costs established by the international headquarters (if applicable) for initiation and pledging during the first semester of membership.

**Assignment #21/M12:**

I could not find anything appropriate to my project in the archives. Most of what came up in my search was either a restricted image of religious art used in classes, or an article which had nothing to do with student organizations but made mention of the campus religious center or a religious service (usually connected to a tragedy and not hosted by RSOs). It seems clear to me that ISU undervalues the history of it's students' religious life, or perhaps has very limited access to the records of Christian RSOs.
**Visual Data**

Assignment #20/M11: Visual Data. (10pts): Take a photograph of your research “site” or relevant situation. Or, bring an object related to your research project. Write 1-2 pages about why you’ve chosen this picture or object and why it is important. What ethnographic information does it convey? Post under “Data” in your Moodle file. (15 pts)

**** insert discussion of photography as data collection ****

**Discuss:**

My final results are attached as a word doc, but for those interested, here's my methods section:

**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.

EUI Links:

Reflect: The research process thus far has been both engaging an frustrating. I enjoy the exploratory process of the work - I love it when I leave an interview with twice as many questions as when it began. This, however, contributes to my growing frustration - I don’t have enough time! I feel like it is impossible to conduct the kind of research I want to within such a short time frame. This is not an unusual problem for me. I often make projects like this more difficult and involved than they need to be. But with this project in particular, I know what I am only scratching the surface, and each new piece of information spurs me further down a path that I will eventually have to abandon for the sake of time.

Another frustration is the “university link”. I know that the EUI is in place so that we can learn more about the university, but I feel like it’s sort of limiting to the research. My topic can easily be linked to the university, but to be honest, this kind of inductive research leads itself in many ways, and the data and questions I’ve gathered so far are not leading me toward analysis of the university. It seems as though a link to the university would, at this point, be sort of forced and unconnected to the project.

Bah.

Outside of these issues, I am enjoying the work immensely.