

DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES

U of VA XA

Core Group Model – Insight from UVA

Takeaways

- cores are the life blood of the ministry
- cores provide exponential growth
- ministry is organized through cores
- the core structure is simple reproducible efficient system
- students take responsibility for ministry through the core system

General:

Small Groups, Bible Studies, Cell Groups...
what's so different about "Core Groups?"

It seems everybody has their own ideas of how to best do small groups in their ministry, but often those small groups are not really the lifeblood of their ministry. All of those groups are good and helpful, but they often don't seem to experience healthy growth and grow year after year, and the overall ministry is not usually organized through the small group ministries. The difference with the "Core Group Model" to what so many people have as their small group Bible studies, all comes down to the "system" which is in place to effectively engage and involve students in taking responsibility for doing the work of ministry.

Questions:

1. Can you describe your system for core groups?
2. What parts of your system seem to be bogging down?

What is the system we are advocating?

The “Core Group Model” is simply a system that develops a healthy network of student-led Discipleship Small Groups. **The common issue in ministries that are having difficulty with their small groups, is not so much a “people problem” but rather a “systems problem.”** Most often when small group ministry isn’t seeming to work well, we’ve over complicated our system or structure on how small groups operate, as well as how our overall ministries operate. This takes our best people out of commission for making disciples, makes everything staff-dependent and does not present a clear path for students to engage in becoming a leader and disciple maker themselves. In other words, it’s not very “empowering.”

Secondly, since “community” is such a core necessity in the life of a believer, we need to be sure that our system is working for us and not against us.

The “system” for establishing and growing Discipleship Small Groups, commonly referred to as “Core Groups”, connects community, discipleship and mission (Community and Missional Discipleship together)

Core Model

- Clear structure
- Simple structure
- One type of leader
- Empowers students
- Path to leadership is clear
- Community is a best done while on mission together
- Discipleship is best done as a community on mission together

Typical Problems of Many Small Groups

- over complicated small group discipleship system or structure
- over complicated ministry structure (multiple leader types)
- Best people are not disciplemakers
- staff dependent
- unclear/difficult path to becoming a leader or disciplemaker

We must remember that when it's all said and done, **our mission is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ on the university campus.”** The Core Group Model has evolved at UVA over a 12 year run as they have purposed to do this very thing.

Summation:

In a nutshell Core Group Structure is an intentional & strategic engagement of students motivated by love and focused on relationships.

3 Anchors:

Real Devotional Life, Real Community, Real Responsibility
(See “Can it really be that simple”)

Takeaways:

A systems problem can prevent small group success

Poor systems: overly complicated small group structure, or ministry structure in general (system is not efficient or even works against goals)

A good system allows for group effectiveness to grow and multiply

ie. UVA only has one type of leader... small group/core leader, the work is done through the small groups. They do not want their best people taken out of making disciples

Discipleship should take place through core group structure (engaging, establishing, equipping, empowering)

A clear path to becoming a leader and disciple maker is needed

Questions:

Think about each component and goal:

1. Do you have an intentional and strategic engagement of students (What's the plan?)
2. Are you motivated by love (What's the motivating heart?)
3. Are you focused on relationships (What does it look like?)

Key Components

Intentional and Strategic Engagement

There's a hard-core focus on connecting and integrating new students, with Core Groups as the "vehicle." Core Groups "are" the outreaches. *(Not by inviting to core group, but by the core group intentionally living a missional life of building relationships with others)*

System Efficiency

Frame EVERYTHING through your CORE GROUPS. It's a different paradigm for doing ministry. It's not just adding small groups to your ministry, but "being" a ministry of small groups, that also meets together! (I.e. Students sit together in their core groups, greeters and other leadership positions are accomplished through core group rotation, rides are done through core groups, etc)

Students find themselves in a Core Group before they really know it! That's because Leadership is Intentional about this Core Strategy.

Ministry is built on layers – Students, Student leaders, Staff.

Student Core Group Leaders are responsible to build their own group. They don't hand them a group. However, they do have "Core Group Cards" that students can fill out if interested in knowing more about Cores or attending one. So when the ministry puts on a Welcome Week event or other Social event, there's a great deal of stories being shared personally, along with personal invitations to come along to an upcoming Core Group gathering. You may even know who you want to introduce them to, because you see certain connections or affinities they have with a leader. There's lots of Hand-Offs! Networking is key to get them into a relational fit that seems good and strong, so that it will last!

From the very first gathering... it's about "Core"...

- Vision is Cast for Core Group Involvement;
- Always Model what you want to see Reproduced (you are setting a precedent for future);
- Use Language that is Consistent, so everyone clearly understands.

System structure explained:

Core Groups:

In general, all groups are **gender specific**, Guys or Girls, with the exception of Grad Student groups. It's not that co-ed groups are bad, but they tend to inhibit the kind of openness that Core Groups thrive on. Thus, students prefer the gender specific groups. It just makes things a whole lot easier! Of course, most Chi Alpha ministries know that Grad Students are more mature students, and they typically desire a co-ed setting, especially when some are likely married couples.

Formation:

Groups ideally are formed each Fall Semester with incoming Freshman students. Freshman (1st Years) are together, and we hope to see that continue. 2nd Years remaining together. There's not simply a reshuffle. Then often, because students come and go, 3rd & 4th Years may merge. This is of course your ideal approach, **but getting students connected into meaningful relationships through Core Groups is the point.**

The Core Group Meeting is not all you do together. You seek to do LIFE together. All sorts of things. But regarding the Core Group Meeting...

4 components of Core Group:

Welcome, Worship, Share (Study), Prayer - Any Order you want. (There's plenty of training resources and Core resources that follow these components and make it easy for student leaders to facilitate and lead meetings.

*For Resources and Training material from UVA you can use freely the resources at:
<http://www.xaatuva.com/resource/>

Excellent tools are specifically written by XA staff for Core Group ministry and these resources are available on the UVA website, but not required studies. You will teach the best, what you own the most! So, don't insist on what they teach. But, make plenty of resources and ideas available. Resource but don't dictate. They can do what they are passionate about, and create their own studies if so desired. However, they should get approval from their Staff mentor.

I (Jeff) am very excited about the tools from 3DM (Helping a core group become missional)
[The Gospel Primer](#) (8 week missional study on understanding and living the Gospel)
[The Tangible Kingdom Primer](#) (8 week guide to incarnational community)
[The Barefoot Church Primer](#) (8 week guide to putting mission back into our core groups)

Starting with new people - especially in new ministries, **the leader must be very hands-on, very directive.** Have a clear week 1 plan, week 2, etc.

Remember, high authenticity, high relationship.
(not just a meeting)

Week 1: short study on what will it take to have authentic Christian community?

History giving (life history sharing): Leader digs deep, goes first.

Ask a question, like what incident in your life has most impacted your life to date, but not your Jesus moment. Don't share your spiritual journey yet. Save it for week 2.

Week 2: short study, possibly a continuation of week 1, then **“Spiritual history sharing.”** Share where you are with Jesus in your journey, and briefly how you've gotten here.

Later on (& often) we incorporate this **“life sharing”** as the “Welcome” part of Core – we may do this with sharing our “hi-low” for the week?

Leaders set the bar. Be willing to go deep personally. They will follow. Must Grow Deep first, before you grow large. Set the depth meter. Model what your core group leader did for you. Reiterate their model, but go a little deeper in your own way. This keeps it evolving deeper and with quality. (The campus pastor/staff must lead the first core groups in order to model and imprint this to the leaders) (They cannot do what you have not shown them)

The Core groups are the outreach! Together we “engage” the lost of our community (our campus). We “go out” together, we invite them to “come in,” together.

Make a goal to have 1 baptism per core group each year. 1 new convert.

One great way they do this, regardless of all the other “engaging activities”, the “Intentionally Loving” particular students. They encourage the Core Group to pick 1 person at a time, and as a group, and “Love Bomb” them!!!! (Not in a cult like way... but be intentional and focused as a group) Everyone goes out of their way to pray for this person, to encourage them, show acts of kindness, and generally blast them with healthy doses of the love of Jesus.

Core Groups serve together. Core Groups take assignments for duties at large meeting. Every week greeters are different, as Core Groups are assigned each week. Why have a permanent Greeter team, because then they are taken OUT of being leaders in Cores. Let everything flow from Cores.

Core Groups provide much needed pastoral care. Belonging to a Core Group is great for needy people, because the group provide pastoral nurture. When you have a pack of sled dogs, and you get a new one, you throw the new one in with the pack, and they learn from the pack. The most healing thing is a “community”, often even more so than a great private counseling session.

Core Families:

Core Group Families: Brother/Sister partnering of core groups. Guy group with Girls group(s) 2-3 groups joined together, to create a Brother-Sister Family Web. **Core group members** are the ones responsible to create things to do, communicate it, etc. Not the leaders since they really don't have the time, nor should they be responsible for it. You do everything with your Core Group, **EVERYTHING!** Live life with your Core! **What are WE doing this Weekend?** Not what will I do? And the same is often done incorporating your Core Family groups. *(The danger is that XA groups so value community that they try to do this as a main group... this will make the large group stay the size of a core group)*

Pay attention to year & geography when making up Core Families. It's okay to encourage dating. Don't be weird about it, but teach a healthy view. Guys too often become way too passive. Consequently, girls are often frustrated. Where better to find a "missional disciple of Jesus" as a life partner?

HUB to WEB Concept:

- **Core Group is the smallest web.** The leader is the Hub. They must teach the members of the Core group to connect with the rest of the others in the group, not just them. **This networking creates a WEB.** Then we have **Family Cores** which bond 2 or 3 groups (Brother/Sister Cores) and that enlarges the WEB.
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- **“Lunch Buddies”** – at the end of Core group, ask everyone to pair up with someone you haven’t had lunch with yet, and make a lunch appointment.
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- **Excellent structure and methodology is available, but not forced.** They are given room to be creative.

Student Leaders are Core Group Leaders:

There is **only 1 kind of leader** when working with the Core Group Model... A Core Group Leader! That's it. There are no Student Leaders that are not Core Group Leaders.

No one becomes a leader until they have been in a Core Group for 1 year. **They must experientially get it before they can share it.**

Student Leaders are first identified as candidates and **recommended for Leadership by their Core Group Leader**. The character of the potential leader is then observable, even if they don't possess the full skill set yet. They are going to be learning on the way. (These candidates then are invited to meet with the director in the 2nd semester)

The candidates are invited to attend the D-Group (**Discipleship Group – Special Course led by Staff – 6-9 week course/1 hour weekly**). This is typically done February-March.

Following that, Staff will determine who will become new Student Core Leaders prior to Summer break.

They train plenty, but they have already been at least 1 full year in a Core Group, **seeing it modeled**.

Observations:

- **Student leaders clearly have caught the vision.** They speak the same language of the Staff. They can clearly articulate it. They know what a WIN looks like... a healthy Discipleship group!
- **Leaders demonstrate an authentic excitement in meeting NEW people.** Student Leaders (Core Group Leaders – Servant Leaders) are the go-getters of new students. They are working hard to meet new students, get info, make contact, show welcome, invite, etc.

We must have Leader Commitment!

A “Level 1” Relationship will not equal a “Level 3” Commitment from a leader. **We must go deep with leaders** to gain the level of commitment to serve as a leader. So-to-speak, they ought to be married to XA, not just dating XA. That’s a commitment of choice, not feeling. Leaders need to take lead on move-ins, orientations, WOW events, working the parties.

Their **MOST** important meeting of the year is **LEADERSHIP WEEKEND** one week prior to move-in. This is when they go through the Core Group Servant Leader Manual and do the actual training of HOW TO BUILD A CORE GROUP that a leader needs. **It’s mandatory, and it’s timely... right before you start doing it.**

Most Core Groups **have 2 or 3 Leaders** who lead together. With a 4:1 Student to Leader Ratio for Core Groups: Everyone co-leads, so 10 is your top group size, ideally, unless it's Tri-led, allowing for 15.

This is especially helpful in high academic-driven campus. No one is the Main Leader necessarily, but they co-lead. Each takes a turn weekly facilitating the gathering, but all do one-on-ones.

“Servant Leaders” (Core Group Leaders) are challenged to be the best Big-Brother or Big-Sister they can possibly be to their students.

“Leader pairings” are important as well. **Try for best friends!** They model good friendship. They don't have to start from scratch relationally.

In Leadership Interviews - ask, “If you could choose who you would lead with, who would it be?” It's your hope that they have a great experience and repeat next year. Relationships are what draws and keeps people involved. **Don't forcibly reshuffle groups each year.**

Try to maintain relationships. One co-leader may start a group next year with 1st Year students. But one stays as an Anchor Leader and pulls another one into co-leader role for new year with original group. Hedge leaders in their pairings with someone stronger where they are weaker if possible.

As we've said, 1st years are together; 2nd years tend to remain together; 3rd & 4th occasionally merge.

Student Leaders Time Commitment:

We recommend 6 XA meetings of various kinds over 2 weeks.
About 8-12 hours of XA per week commitment.

1. Core group mtg. (weekly)
2. One-one-Ones (about 2 a week) (each one every other week – Focus on Health)
3. Resource Team (1x month)
4. Core Group Leader Planning time (planning what their Core Group is going to do together).
5. Student Leader Meeting (1x month) All Student Leaders together, with Director sharing important necessary info. Otherwise, they don't have a meeting for the sake of a meeting.
6. Large Gathering (weekly)

One-on-One's:

- Not necessarily structured, but seeking out what the person needs. **After we really get to know them**, we can address and help them discover what they need next. “Core Competencies” are helpful tools to utilize with them.
- **Accountability Questions:** Family, Friends, School, Spiritual life.

Students are pastored & mentored by Core Group Servant leaders.

4:1 ratio is good, and since they are Bi-led, or Tri-led, groups would ideally be 5, 10, 15 in number. Of course, they are all sorts of sizes, and they don't split groups up mid-year but let it grow uninterrupted! They hope for continuity in groups for the long haul, except for the sending out of new student leaders.

Core Group Servant Leaders are pastored and mentored by STAFF.

This is an Absolute Key behavior. 8:1 ratio is good, and **Staff have 1-on-1's with each individual every 2 weeks.** It's great for staff because their "Joy level" goes up! Let them be leaders. Staff need to invest much with their student leaders, **but also pastor the rest of the XA community as well.**

Staff are pastored & cared for by Campus Director. 1-on1's and Staff gatherings, etc.

New Believers:

When someone makes a decision to follow Christ, they should be **established weekly** through a one-on-one. Resources for this are online. There are many great booklets you can use to accomplish this over 4-6 weeks generally. You may want to carry on longer as you feel led depending on the situation. They should continue attending their Core Group, but have additional time for 1-on-1 with Core Group member who is “Establishing” them by going through **New Believer Basics**.

The Leaders take responsibility to be sure this happens without fail, but it does not mean they themselves should only be the ones “establishing” new believers. This is an important part of discipleship, making sure every disciple in your group knows HOW TO ESTABLISH another person in their new walk with Jesus. **Remember, we don't want New Believers becoming dependent on their “Discipler” (as in the Spiritual Guru)**, but rather, dependent on Jesus & His Word. And we want them to develop healthy relationships with many Christians as soon as possible, which is why they should maintain their involvement in Core Group. **We “Do Discipleship” in Small Groups, not just one-on-one.**

Resource Meetings/Resource Leaders: (monthly- 8 core leaders with staff person)

They (Core Group Leaders) have a Resource Team meeting monthly, which is bringing your 8 or so group together casually at your home for instance, for food. You're asking, "How is it going?" Is your group having issues; what's troubling; what insights have you discovered; what do you need; struggles in any area with responsibilities, with students, with self? **It's casual**, not a structured teaching. **Minister, pray and care for them!**

Resource Team Mentors: Eventually, Student leaders that are proven and good mentors, may become Student Leader resource people for 4 new student leaders, especially if your student leaders exceed your staff's ability to keep up with growth.

The 4th year leaders serving as RTM's do not lead a small group then, but attend one. They instead do time with their 4 new leaders.

Core Group Leaders Meetings: (as needed, monthly or so... all core leaders). (Training)

Student Core Leaders Meeting (1x month if needed). All Student Leaders come together with Director/or Staff, sharing important and necessary information. It's meant to develop leaders and bring important, beneficial training. Otherwise, they don't have a meeting for the sake of a meeting. Sometimes it's just not necessary. This is the call of the director.

STAFF

Administration:

Administration of the structure is important and necessary or we lose many opportunities.

3 different structures for Staff Leaders.

- 1) 1 on 1 every 2 weeks. (8 to staff) Focus on their health.
 - 2) 1x month an informal mentoring time with their 8. Learning what works, ideas, growing together.
 - 3) 1x month - all Leaders meet together. Training.
- (Only if we have something meaningful and needed to say. But not for a meeting's sake.)

Typical Weekly schedule (for STAFF):

- Most groups are tri-led. Some are bi-led. They split up the group among the 2-3 leaders for one-on-ones. (No leader should have more than 5 students to do 1-on-1's with over 2 weeks.)
- Prep for large group responsibilities
- Staff meeting is significant (5 hours of time)
- Lots of Student meetings.
- Each Staff member shares in the Student Leader Mentoring responsibilities. Each having 1-on-1's with a small group of student leaders.
- 2 by 2 evangelism, Contact tables, etc.
- Some involved in Int'l Student ministry (Int'l Cores, Alpha, outreach/services). (they use the UK updated version of videos for Alpha, not Nicky Gumbel's version, these are 20-25 minutes.)
- Every morning 15 minute Check-in time together (9:25am) sharing your plan for the day. If you don't have a full schedule, it will get filled.
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Organizational strategy & Pastoral care are the great strengths for making this model work. **We model what we want reproduced by students.**

Missions is a priority. CMIT's all Co-Lead a Spring Break Missions Trip. Fundraising begins in OCT. mostly over their Christmas Break.

Steady Incremental Growth:

Healthy ministry never grows overnight. It grows incrementally yearly. It's about doing the right things, over and over, again and again, patiently. Being vision-driven, not numbers-driven.

For UVA, they started with their Core Group Model, with just a hand full. 12 years later, they have about 50 Core groups. 600 students. 125 leaders approximately.

Work hard at increasing your “Capacity.” Then God will fill that capacity. If He gave Israel the Promised land all at once, it would have become a Zoo. Wild animals running everywhere. They didn't have the capacity to care for it. It came incrementally.

Increase your capacity and trust God to fill it. And keep doing the same... **increase capacity. Make Disciples that make disciples.**

You can build a structure but there are **Qualitative things** that need to be true. Your structures need to facilitate these things.

7 Characteristics of Growing Campus Ministries:

- Great Communication
- Spiritually Interactive Worship
- Environment of Healthy Potential Friends and Spouses
- Credible Witness Planned at the DNA Level of Every Activity
- Simple Sticky Plans
- Excellent Execution
- Solving Name Recognition Problems

Spring break trips:

In keeping with the “Hub to Web concept,” Spring break trips do this wonderfully! Connecting smaller webs into a larger web. Your Core Group Families are a smaller web, and something like these mission teams enlarges their web. This is a natural part of doing life together. Do missions somewhere together. Especially focus on connecting these students with one another, not just the team leader.

“Summer” trips don't have relational aftermath that impacts the culture of your ministry. The reason being, they go directly home following the trip! “Spring Break” trips end with everyone coming back to campus and the XA community. UVA only do Spring Break Trips now (1 week trips).

Leadership Weekend Retreat:

Their MOST important meeting of the year is LEADERSHIP WEEKEND one week prior to move-in.

Typical Weekend:

- Master plan of Evangelism - 3hr session.
- PROAPT concept. How to study Word.
- Speak and inspire.
- Then 4 wins of a core group

The Binder - go through the “**Core Group Servant Leader Manual**”

Calendar at night - Then time to plan out their entire semester with their co-leader.

Last day-Sunday AM, give the History of your fellowship. Really builds identity to family.

Then that week following, at your Main Weekly Gathering Night, it serves as their Family Reunion time. It's not so much about trying to get new students there, but connecting with returning students. It's ok to have this early on, but don't let it exceed priority over Core groups. We hit “Core Group” importance and value immediately.

Your **main Weekly Gathering** needs to have regularity of gathering (Same place, same night, same time.) It's a rallying point!

3 Anchors - Living Anchored Lives

- 1) Real Devotional Life – Grow
- 2) Real Community – Connect
- 3) Real Responsibility – Reach

RESOURCES

“Discipleship Group” (9 weeks) *also referred to as “D-group”*

These studies are the basis for training these potential new student leaders. This is generally a 60-minute meeting, once a week for 9 weeks. Since new leaders are usually preparing in the Spring Semester for leading in the Fall, you might want to ideally offer this Mid-February through Mid-April. If that's too close to the end of Spring Semester, then start Early-February. This will give you time to recruit students for this special class led by you as Director or appointed Staff. This is not a specific “how to lead” training, but a preparation for the leader, heart, soul and mind. When Pioneering a group, you could go through this D-Group material with the individuals you've chosen to help you in your initial upstart Core Group(s) in the months prior to starting your groups on-campus.

Week 1: [Discipleship](#) and [Topical Memory System](#)

Week 2: [Real Devotional Life: Word](#)

Week 3: [Real Devotional Life: Word 2](#) and [PROAPT Bible Study Method](#)

Week 4: [Real Devotional Life: Prayer](#) and [Work and Prayer](#) by C.S. Lewis

Week 5: [Real Community](#)

Week 6: [Real Responsibility](#)

Week 7: [Theology: Deity and Humanity of Jesus](#)

Week 8: [Theology: Identity](#)

Week 9: [Theology: High View of God, Low View of Sin](#)

“Servant Leader Training Manual” – Weekend Retreat

(Designed as a 48 hour, Weekend Retreat, prior to start of Fall Semester)

***ABSOLUTELY MANDATORY FOR ALL STUDENT LEADERS**

Both the “Core Group Servant Leader Training Manual” and “Teaching Notes” are downloadable. This works well as a Friday, NOON through Sunday, NOON retreat. (2 nights) This provides an excellent preparation for all leaders to get their minds and hearts aligned for building their small groups at the start of the semester and over the next 30 days or so. This is the official “classroom training.” The real training for them has been modeled for at least a full year of attending their Core Group. When Pioneering a group you will need to take anyone leading a group or assisting in leading a group through this material at an appropriate time prior to starting your groups on-campus.

1. Leader’s and Student’s Manual
2. [Videos of IU’s leader’s Retreat](#)

LEADER RESOURCES: for 1-on-1's & Core Group Studies

Go to “Discipleship Tools” – on top menu bar (click for all other resources)

“Competencies”

“Core Group Studies”

“Topical Resources”

“**Competencies**” takes you to “core competencies” which are numerous studies (22) based on the

“**3 Anchors**” concept of what Disciples really need to acquire. **Read Article** “Can It Really Be That Simple?”

- Real Devotional Life
- Real Community
- Real Responsibility

These ‘competencies’ are excellent for using in your “one-on-ones” with your Core Group members. They can also be used for individual study or even group studies. They consist of an article, with questions for discussion. For “Bible Study” format of these Anchors, look under “Topical Studies” – General – Anchors.

“Core Group Studies” (Bible, Topical & Book Studies for Core Groups)

“Books of the Bible” – 10 Books totaling 77 Studies. In reality, you have about 25-28 weeks for Core Group meetings in the academic year, if you do not meet over the Summer months. That’s about 3 year’s worth of Book of the Bible studies available now for your use! And we’re just getting started!!

“Topical Studies”

General

“Anchors” – 9-week Study on the 3 Anchors (real devotional life, real community, real responsibility)

“The Normal Christian Life” – 10 weeks

Community

“Real Community: Acts”

“Real Community: Ecclesiastes”

“Own It” – 2 weeks

Evangelism

“A Study on Evangelism” – 8 weeks

“Becoming a Contagious Christian” – 6 weeks

“Relational Evangelism Study”

“Topical Resources” all types of great resources (each has multiple studies)

Many of these are excellent in helping you with materials for “one-on-ones” with your Core Group members.

- New Resources
- Decision Making
- Discipleship
- Discipleship Basics
- Evangelism
- Finances
- Forgiveness
- Holy Spirit
- Identity
- International Friendships (XAi)
- Life-Controlling Issues
- Missions
- New Believer
- Prayer
- Relationships
- Scripture
- Spiritual Gifts
- Theology
- Time Management
- Worship

<http://www.xaatuva.com/resource/>

Check out Garry Miller's 4 Part Discipleship Training