

# MULTIETHNIC MINISTRIES DEFINITIONS

**Summary:** *A basic guide to common terms used in multiethnic ministry work.*

## MULTIETHNICITY

A term that we use in InterVarsity to describe God's value for people of every ethnicity and culture.

## RACE

Race is a form of **biological** grouping defined by skin color and other phenotypical manifestations (shape of facial features, hair type, etc.).

- Racial categories are biological categories that are not "real" biologically. Not that there is no genetic basis for physical differences, but there is no genetic basis for *distinct categories*. For instance, how do you define the boundaries of "black," when skin color basically exists as a continuous spectrum across the world? The same is true of *all* phenotypical characteristics that have been used to create definitions of different races.
- Racial categories emerged alongside modernity and European colonization. Ethnocentrism (see "ethnicity") is universal throughout history. Racism is a uniquely modern form of ethnocentrism in its global reach and its (incorrect) basis in biology, which made the categories appear objective and indisputable. So, although race is not a valid biblical or biological category, the effects of such a grouping persist. They are seen particularly in the distribution of economic and cultural power between peoples belonging to those groupings during and after the colonial era. The historical phenomenon of race has shaped the development of cultural and ethnic groups (see below) that *ARE* valid biblical ways of group identification.

## ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is a form of **historical** grouping defined by people who share a common heritage, a common story.

- Unlike race, ethnicity IS a biblically valid way of group identification and is a VERY prominent theme in Scripture's teaching on humanity and our relationship to God.
- Ethnicity is not culture. Common heritage is accompanied by cultural ideals and archetypes, but is not identical defined by them. For instance, a Chinese infant adopted into an African American family may not share much Chinese culture, but her story and therefore heritage remains one that originated with the Chinese people.
- Ethnicity is not race – although in our country more than most, the terms overlap a great deal.
  - The farther you are from immigration (involuntary or voluntary), the less likely you are to identify with your ancestral ethnic roots. Instead, over time, new stories ascend and therefore new ethnic groups form.
  - For example, for many African Americans and European Americans, race and ethnicity are the same. This is largely because of the extent to which racial categories have played a significant part in the story and heritage of North America.
  - For many Asian and Latino Americans, identification with their ethnic communities (as opposed to their racial ones) is more common in part because these communities tend to be closer, historically, to their immigration.

## CULTURE

Culture is a form of **social** grouping defined by people who share a common pattern of relating, ways of doing family, social behaviors, creative expressions, deep values, and religious and philosophical perspective.

- Unlike race and ethnicity, a person can choose and change their own culture and cultural identification. Many will do so do so many times over a lifetime.

- Every social group and sub-group will quickly develop a culture to some extent. Cultures can be deep, vast, and long-standing (i.e. Buddhist culture), or ephemeral and relatively limited (the culture of a middle school friendship circle).
- Culture is our appropriate human response to God’s creation. However, since cultural patterns can be sinful, affirmation of culture and cultures must be qualified by values of the Kingdom.

## MULTI-CHAPTER

A campus strategy that involves having multiple chapters that are organized by region of campus, ethnic focus or strategic focus.

## ETHNIC GENERAL

A fellowship that is seeking to reach, include, and empower students from every ethnicity and culture on campus.

## ETHNIC SPECIFIC

A fellowship that strategically focused on reaching a particular ethnic population or populations on campus. While they are “specific” in focus, they are committed to welcoming and including all. Ethnic specific chapters will typically have significant ethnic diversity within its focus. For instance, in a Black Campus Ministry group there may be African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Africans, etc.

## MULTIETHNIC CHAPTER (OR MINISTRY)

A chapter or group of chapters that is effectively reaching, including, and empowering students from every ethnic group on campus. This effectiveness is characterized by both reflecting the population of the mission field and by mutual affirmation and partnership among students in the ministry.

## ME 1%

InterVarsity recognizes the existence of systemic barriers to the empowerment of ethnic minority staff and their ministry within our organization. In the late 80s, staff decided to “tax” themselves ½% more overhead to help fund more ethnic minority staff. It’s now matched by national leadership = 1%. Of the 13% overhead from all donations, 1% of that is allocated each year as one way to facilitate the contribution of ethnic minority staff toward our shared mission.

## INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

The ability to interact effectively with people of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds, particularly in the context of student/faculty ministry, camps, office work, and organizational management. To acquire greater intercultural competency one must continually grow in the following areas: biblical understanding, historical knowledge, personal awareness, and skills development. This must exist in a context of constant learning and honest humility for an individual’s competence to result in ministry effectiveness.

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