

# Are there cults on our campus?

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My "Cults on Campus" file has been growing this semester, primarily because two students came to see me recently to tell their own story. New to CSULB, they had transferred from a community college in a smaller California city. They were approached by a recruiter from a cult group who, as they told me, had used all of the classic techniques known to be typical of such groups. The interesting thing is that this group identifies itself as "Christian." At the same time, the recruiter insisted that his group was the only "true" Christian faith community, and that they had to leave the church their parents had raised

them in, so that they could be with the "true church." The students came into our University Interfaith Center seeking some way to understand what had happened to them, and how they should respond to the recruiter.

While not arguing doctrinal differences, it is important to examine recruitment techniques used by cults of all kinds: political, religious, etc.

**You know you are being recruited by a cult when:**

— the leader is identified as an absolute authority figure, whose word is final and non-debateable.

— you are encouraged to spend little or no time with your friends or family, and most of your time with the leaders, recruiters, and followers of the movement.

— you are told the group meetings and studies are of crucial importance, and your attendance is mandatory.

— you are teamed with a "friend/guide/partner" who is to spend ex-

tensive time with you and keep you on track.

— you are asked to attend a private retreat for a weekend, transportation provided by the group so you cannot leave on your own.

— you are "counseled" for such extended hours you suffer sleep deprivation and anxiety.

These and other techniques are forms of "mind control" which cult groups use to attract and win members. In the world of religion we often think of cults as being "satanic." The facts reveal religious movements of many kinds may exhibit cult tendencies. That a group identifies itself as "Christian" does not necessarily mean it is free of cultic influences and style of recruitment.

So back to our original question: **Are there cults on our campus?** Yes, and they are recruiting here, within the Student Union, in the dorms, and other spots on this campus. They are smooth, very friendly, warm people who seem to become

instant friends and confidants, with unlimited time to spend with you and who want you to feel most important to them. They are also manipulative, demanding, insistent and more interested in winning you to their movement than they are really interested in you as a person. Since they don't wear a sign saying "I am a cult recruiter" you will not always see them for what they are. So what to do??

Learn to be a questioner. Suspect "instant friends" with an agenda for your life. Talk with other students, faculty, campus ministers about any apparent approach by a recruiter. And remember, cults send their best people out to recruit, so you may not quickly recognize what is happening when you are first approached.

*\*Editor's note: While this article addresses primarily the Cal State Campus at Long Beach, it focuses on a concern for all of our campuses, and elsewhere.*

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