



6¹/₂ REASONS *for a degree in* INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

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A choir formed by students and spouses from the Korean Studies Program provides beautiful intercultural music for SIS' 50th Anniversary Celebration. The program, opened by Fuller in 1999, allows students to earn degrees fully in the Korean language.

In the early years of the 21st century, mission degrees and programs began to transform into degrees in “intercultural studies.” The change was necessary, intentional, and controversial. The degrees broadened in scope to prepare Christian leaders for more than traditional missionary work overseas. As the West was slowly recognized as a mission field, some began to equip themselves with intercultural studies (ICS) degrees in order to reach different cultural groups—“unreached peoples”—in North America. Others enrolled in ICS programs to engage in development work, pursue reconciliation work, or enter the struggle against human trafficking. Motivations and vocations are now much more diverse than they were when mission degrees first emerged in the middle of the 20th century.

Today, however, the ICS degree is proving to be more than a valuable degree for the global church. It has also become a challenge to basic assumptions about “theological education” as well as a tool for meeting

the global and cultural challenges that the church faces in our time. The ICS degree has brought to light the value of the social sciences and the integration of classic theological disciplines for the global church of the 21st century.

What is an intercultural studies degree? Not all intercultural degrees are the same, but a good program will include the following:

1. anthropology and religions
2. Bible and theology

3. history of the world Christian movement
4. spiritual formation for cross-cultural ministry
5. leadership for transformation
6. specialized area (e.g., church planting, children at risk, development, Islam)

These topics will often be addressed in integrated ways—through such courses, for example, as *Missional Interpretations of Scripture* or *Anthropology for Witness*.

Nearly all ICS degrees involve both quantitative and qualitative research, using the social sciences to better understand the human condition, social needs, and how to be faithful to God’s mission in particular local contexts. Students usually find that when they study local cultural contexts they learn more about the God who walks in and has great joy in human cultures.

What follows are six and a half reasons why we need more Christian leaders to pursue a degree in intercultural studies.

1. Hospitality requires it.

We now live in a pluralistic world in which we need cultural awareness and wisdom in order to appreciate our neighbors, to shop at our local businesses, and, especially, to reach out to the new immigrants or refugees in our cities.



MAICS '15 grad Oscar Merlo works as the executive director of the Alberto Motteschi Evangelistic Association, a Christian non-profit corporation that equips Hispanic Christian leaders and provides ministerial resources for the Hispanic Church worldwide.

2. Translation is not optional.

Being a Christian in the midst of migration and pluralism means we must constantly be retranslating the gospel to local contexts. Intercultural studies degrees prepare us for this ongoing process of Christian existence that requires re-expressing the Good News in new cultures and contexts.

3. Christendom is over.

The Western church, a church that previously found favor with governments and even influenced laws and ethics, is now a minority church. As missionaries entering a foreign territory, Christian leaders now need to study the Western context as a non-Christian territory. Intercultural studies help us to understand our world as a world that is, at least in part, the fruit of globalization.

4. Church unity craves it.

Church conflict usually stems from challenges in negotiating cultures—young and old, black and white, first and second generation Korean, for example. I have found again and again that an introductory course in missiology goes a long way toward helping pastors negotiate church conflict that is often cultural, generational, or economic.

5. Global violence demands it.

Becoming peacemakers in an increasingly violent world requires awareness of and leadership in the face of cultural and religious conflict and misunderstanding. ICS graduates are equipped to become those guides.

6. Responsible evangelism needs it.

To prepare to work in a different culture or country requires training

about cultures as well as Bible and theology. A good intercultural studies degree prepares a Christian to live in a different culture, to learn a different language and social system, and to serve well.

6¹/₂. One biography proves it.

Arguably the greatest evangelist and church leader of the last half of the 20th century attended three Bible

a multicultural church in Houston, Texas. For still others it is a degree in mission, but with a different name. Overall, I have found that the vast majority of our ICS graduates end up discovering the suffering heart of Christ among the lost, lonely, and unloved in the world. What begins as study of the mission of God becomes a vocation of compassion.

Where might a degree in intercultural studies lead you?



Evelyne Reisacher, associate professor of Islamic studies and intercultural relations, carried the prayers of the Fuller community to the sites of the November 2015 attacks in Paris. As a French citizen, Dr. Reisacher says she “cried out to God, remembering the grief of families who lost loved ones, the suffering of the injured, and the shame of the families and communities of those who perpetrated these shocking acts of terror.”

colleges, yet chose anthropology as his major. Yes, Billy Graham studied cultures—and it can be argued that this prepared him to present the gospel in ways that connected sensitively and well with people and cultures.

A degree in intercultural studies is thus a many-splendored thing . . . for the sake of God’s mission. For some it is the equipping they need to work with an NGO (non-governmental organization) in central Africa. For others it is preparation for planting

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Learn more about Fuller’s degrees in intercultural studies at

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