



# Stumbling Blocks in the System: Looking for Mentors to Lead the Way

Greg H. Parsons



**W**hile we raise the profile of student debt in this issue of *Mission Frontiers*, we should also note a number of other issues that keep mission-minded young people from missionary service. And these issues are inter-related.

Actually, school debt itself isn't a deterrent, or at least it doesn't have to be. School debt becomes a problem because it: (1) gets people out to the field later, (2) gets them into normal patterns of life, which causes (3) mission commitment to wane in the face of additional commitments like marriage, children, a good job, a mortgage, etc.

But it doesn't have to be that way. When I wrote about debt in this column a few years ago, I got an e-mail from a friend who was part of a mini-mission revival at a large Christian college years earlier. A year

after graduation, he was almost debt-free, but then married a woman who was some \$70,000 in debt from the same school (not an unusual level, unfortunately). After seeing my article, he wrote to tell me they had made it! (They

were serving in Southeast Asia with a major mission agency.) How? They worked really hard for 2-3 years to pay off all debt. They lived as cheaply as possible in as small a place as they could, and they ate beans and rice (that's a quote!). That enabled them to apply all of her salary to debt reduction until the loans were repaid, rather than waiting or paying off the debt slowly because the interest rates were so good.

Certainly that is one part of a solution for those going via routes of traditional education. But it brings up another key issue: marriage. What if my friend had married a woman who wasn't committed to the same global purposes?

A few years ago I counseled a young woman who had just gotten married. She was struggling with the fact that her husband – who had demonstrated an interest in missions when they started dating – was no longer interested after they were married. She felt tricked, crushed and trapped. Did she marry the

“wrong” person? Or, more importantly, could someone close to them have seen it coming?

How is it that our children go off to college, choose their life focus, find a mate, and decide where to live and serve? Why do so many of these crucial life choices happen away from home and church, and usually without mature, globally-aware counsel? All too often, these key life choices are made in a vacuum.

Perhaps we view young people as “waiting” to grow up, and thus feel our counsel is unneeded, unhelpful or unwanted? What would happen if we nurtured an interlocking connectedness between our churches, local businesses, schools, and mission agencies to do training in the context of ministry, real work, and field settings? College can be done in this way! And it would provide for real learning, in real-life settings – often with no debt at all.

Existing tools like distance learning, the Internet, field experience, and programs like INSIGHT (see pages 17-18) make it much easier for a church or school to run folks through integrated studies. Beyond that, suppose the local churches also invest financial support in the young leaders they are nurturing. These leaders would receive ongoing mentoring, prayer and real-life ministry experiences, and would be long-term interns on their way to mission service.

We are looking for organizations, ministries and individuals who want to locate on our campus (as well as other sites) and who can help us prepare some of the next generation of young men and women for strategic deployment on the frontiers of God's kingdom. This will involve training at all levels (head, heart and hands) and practical guidance in how to remain intact through the minefield of higher education and mission service.

Let's not allow more potential global servants to fade into the background because the existing system is broken. 🌐



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