

Creative Activism

Thinking outside the box

Congratulations on pursuing that higher education degree. It's quite a commitment on your end. In spite of professors challenging your thinking, multiple all-nighters, a thriving social life, and the real-world job market on the forefront of your mind, have you thought about how you can integrate your passion and your sweat into global AIDS advocacy and activism? It's time to think outside the box and get creative with advocacy. Advocacy is defined as actively supporting or pleading in favor of a cause, idea, or policy. The importance of governmental advocacy is covered in the "Tools of Advocacy" document [add link]. However, being an advocate does not just include political advocacy; it reaches further than public policy and government relations. You do not have to go into medicine, ministry, or politics to care for those affected by AIDS. Though these fields are invaluable, you can use your voice, your time, and your talents in numerous other fields to be an advocate for those living with HIV and AIDS around the world. Here are some ideas to incorporate your talents and interests into radical activism and service right now:

The Arts and Humanities :: Creative expression is a highly effective tool for creating awareness and making an issue visually stimulating and emotionally gripping. As a discipline characterized by inspiration and imagination, there are limitless possibilities for advocacy. Here are some possibilities:

- Art auctions and displays
- Theater productions, musicals, and dramas
- Writers' guild and other publications
- Visual activism or performance art such as the "Do You See Orange?" campaign

Business and Economics :: The spread of HIV is multiplied in poor countries. Micro-enterprise and social entrepreneurship have been effective tools to combat poverty and create a ripple effect that is reducing the spread of HIV. Business people play a key role that you can begin to exercise on campus. You can organize the following:

- Micro-enterprise and social entrepreneurship competitions with your peers and with other schools of business. Either individually or in teams, create a sustainable micro-enterprise strategy or product that can be incorporated into the daily lives of others around the world. When developing your concept, consider all factors that developing communities must face. Consider the strategy and sustainability of the social entrepreneurship project and its response to a social cause or injustice. All participants should present their concepts to peers, professors and other judges who are experts in these disciplines.
- Collaboration with the school of art on projects that can be utilized as income-generating activities. Possibilities include ceramics and clay, fabric and rug making, book designing and binding with natural resources, jewelry making, etc.



- Market research for non-government organizations and humanitarian relief organizations that can benefit from up-to-date trends and warnings in today's fast-paced market.

Medicine and Science :: Health professionals have a very obvious and extremely necessary role in the fight against AIDS. Scientific research, community development, and engineering are also key tasks that require preparation and practice in college. The following are some ideas to consider:

- Visits to developing countries to view first-hand how integral fields such as medicine, nursing, engineering, and agriculture are to creating sustainable development in poor nations.
- Educational forums for the campus community regarding the truth versus the myths and stigmas of HIV and AIDS.

Fast Track

Fasting brings deeper meaning to your prayers and is an opportunity to seek the Lord's heart for real change in the world. The following activity also helps you identify with those who live regularly without the basic necessities that so many of us can take for granted; it's just one idea to stir your imagination toward creative activism. Choose one of the "Fast Tracks" or create a hybrid that works for your campus. This activity is very easy to adapt to your particular campus culture to make it as effective as possible. Keep in mind that it is not an excuse to shirk your courses and assignments.

It is valuable to know the importance of fasting. Most people think of fasting as abstaining from food for a period of time. However, fasting means more than just giving up soda and candy for a couple of weeks. In the Bible, fasting was often a sign of devotion to the Lord – a way to submit to Him in humility and acknowledge that He alone is the giver and sustainer of life (Matthew 4:1-4). Fasting can also be an experience of mourning over loss or tragedy (Joel 1, Nehemiah 1:1-4); it can even be a mark of intercession, crying out to the Lord for breakthrough for a person or situation (Esther 4:15-17, Psalm 35:13). Scriptural examples show that fasting gives authority to our prayers. Isaiah 58 is one of the most important passages about fasting. This passage states clearly that the true purpose of fasting is not personal gain, but advocacy for the suffering. Keep this passage in mind as you conduct this or any other fast. Use this passage for encouragement and accountability to press on:

*Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it for bowing one's head like a reed
And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?
Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?
Is this not the fast which I choose,
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free
And break every yoke?
Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into the house;
When you see the naked, to cover him;
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

—Isaiah 58:5-7 (NASB)

Essentials Fast

The purpose of this five-day fast is for you and your peers to reflect upon the discrepancies in resources and materials around the world and to pray for justice and equity (Galatians 3:28). As Americans, there are many things that are part of our daily lives that most people in the world do not have access to. In this fast, participants will fast from things that are typically considered necessities in American society.

Please consider the following items and choose five things that you can fast from for five consecutive days. Some items you may fast from for one day, others you may choose to lay down for longer. It is part of the process of fasting to realize what is a “need” and what is a “want.” Ask probing questions each day to evaluate the experience and remember its importance.

Clean water: In the developed world we have access to a wide variety of beverages. Yet millions of people worldwide don’t even have access to clean water. By the year 2025, one-third of the world’s population is expected to face severe and chronic water shortages¹. Challenge your campus to abstain from all beverages except for water for one day. This includes soda, coffee, milk, juice, and sports drinks.

Food: One billion people around the world live on less than one dollar a day and often only eat one meal a day. Ask your peers to abstain from food for one day to experience real hunger and intercede for those experiencing hunger every day. Worldwide there are 30,000 children who will die from hunger and related illnesses. Pray for people’s hearts to be moved to feed the hungry.

Shelter: While tight living quarters and difficult roommates can be a real challenge, imagine having no shelter at all. An estimated 150 million children live with no shelter on the world’s streets. This crisis has been tragically intensified in Africa by the AIDS pandemic. Camp outside for one night with only a sleeping bag to identify with the homeless and with refugees worldwide. Make sure to get proper approval from your campus authorities.

Hygiene: Daily showers have become a necessity for most of us. This topic is closely tied to accessibility to clean water. Challenge yourself to not take a shower for a day, several days, or if possible for the entire week.

Clothing: The activity of clothing ourselves can be time-consuming. We must consider colors, accessories, fit, comfort, and more. Many people in developing countries live with only one set of clothing, and there are some people who cannot even afford new clothing when what they have wears out. The luxury of choosing your clothes is not an option to many. Challenge your campus community to wear the same clothes every day for five days.

Transportation: Whether it is a bus, the metro, a bike, a motorcycle, a scooter, or a car, we tend to gravitate toward the most efficient and reliable means of getting around. In sub-Saharan Africa, families can walk several miles each day to school, the market, a health clinic, and even a source of water. Choose to walk to all your typical locations for five days, abstaining from using any and all forms of transportation—even rides from friends.

Questions for reflection

- What was the most difficult thing for you to give up?
- What was the highlight of your time of fasting?
- How did you grow closer to the Lord during this time?

¹ U.S. Agency for International Development. http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/water/

- What did you find the most encouraging or inspirational this week?
- How can this fast affect the world around you? What actions can you take?
- Do you see an overall change in your behavior and thoughts toward these essential items?
- What other essentials do we take for granted in our society? These can be things as well as concepts such as employment, gender equity, democracy, freedom of religion, education, etc.

Luxury Fast

We know you love your cell phone, and if it were not attached to your ear it would be attached to your lips. But did you know the cell phone has only been around for the last 10 years? The purpose of this fast is to open our eyes not only to the simple necessities we take for granted, but to the wonderful “luxuries” we have become so desperately attached to. This works similarly to the essentials fast. Choose at least two luxuries to fast from during a five-day period. Some items you may fast from for one day, others you may choose to lay down for longer:

Technology (cell phones, Internet, IM, text messaging, e-mail, MP3 player): Remember that this is not an excuse to get out from doing your homework and studying for tests, but a challenge to abstain from any unnecessary use of technology outside of what is necessary for academic survival. Option: Talk to your professors about this fast and extend to them the opportunity to incorporate it into your classes. Perhaps you can coordinate a campus-wide fast, including not only students but members of the administration and faculty.

Noise: We surround ourselves with noise – music, television, talking, even the mental noise of reading. Choose to pursue silence for an entire day, seeking places of solitude to reflect and pray.

Personal grooming: See how far you can go without primping. No make up. No hair products. No blow dryers or straight irons. No razors or clippers. Challenge yourself to endure for five days.

Entertainment: The United States is full of stimulation and entertainment around every corner. It is difficult to go anywhere without being distracted with ads touting more opportunities for consumerism and leisure. Abstain from all entertainment—movies, music, books, going out, TV, video games, reality shows, etc. Invest your time in a service project on your campus or in your community.

Shopping: Try to not buy anything for five days. If you are not fasting from food during this period, make sure that you will have enough food to last you through this time.

Questions for reflection

- How much money do you spend on coffee or soda each day?
- How many times do you eat out each week? How much money do you spend?
- How much time do you spend on your cell phone? Instant messaging? Text messaging?
- Throughout the week of fasting, what did you spend most of your energy and time on?
- Did you see an overall change in your behavior and thoughts toward these ‘luxury items’?
- What was the most difficult thing this week for you to give up?

- What did you find the most inspirational and encouraging this week?
- How did you get closer to the Lord during this time?
- What was the highlight of your time of fasting?
- How can these fasts affect the world around you?

Hybrid Fast

This is a combination of the Essential and Luxury Fasts. Evaluate your campus culture and consider creating a hybrid of these two fasts.

Next steps:

- 1) Consider a week that would harmonize with your campus calendar and encourage maximum participation. The week of World AIDS Day (December 1) is a great time, but it is most important to evaluate your specific campus schedule. In addition, think about the time you will need for your team need to promote and advertise this week of activities.
- 2) Decide which Fast Track you want to take.
- 3) Each day of the week, focus on a particular item from the Fast Track that you want to address in your campus community.
- 4) Plan and promote the activities surrounding each day and the items from which students are fasting.
- 5) Provide opportunities for students to come together each day for discussion, support, and encouragement.

Events that Can Incorporate Fasting

World AIDS Day—Lives Are At Stake :: This is a campus-wide awareness event that can include not only students, but staff, faculty, administration, churches, and community members. Please see the document on “Lives Are At Stake” for more information [add doc link]. Chapters are encouraged to creatively develop other activities around this event, such as speakers or forums, times for worship, advocacy activities, fundraising activities, etc. Some campuses may also wish to add a fasting element. Fasting will definitely increase the power for change and focus on prayer for participating individuals.

Broken Bread Meal :: This is a creative activism meal for educating campuses and raising resources for those affected by both AIDS and hunger. Check out the document about this event in this toolkit and consider organizing it on your campus.

How will you step outside the box?

Imagine a world of people who excel at public policy and advocacy but nothing else. Who would write plays and literature? Who would draw people into an alternate reality through canvases of paint and sculpture? Who would create music that can move the soul? Where would the engineers be who create the infrastructure, homes, and bridges that all of us need? Christ calls his church the Body because each person has a specific role and function. We all have a part to play. How will you use your talents to act on AIDS?