

## **Ethical Reflection Institutional Student Learning Outcome Assessment Analysis and Report**

### **Ethical Reflection Institutional Student Learning Outcome**

Ethical reflection is one of the Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLO) established by Gustavus Adolphus College. Below is the College understanding (i.e., definition) of ethical reflection, followed by the ISLO itself:

College Understanding: Ethical reflection is the thoughtful evaluation of ethical questions and the development of a critical awareness regarding the values that inform the choices all people, including oneself, make when confronting such questions.

Institutional Student Learning Outcome: Students will critically contemplate the conflicting value choices of the ethically complex world in which we live, will articulate their own values, and will reflect on how these values shape their ethical decisions.

### **Introduction**

In 2015, the ISLO Committee established an Ethical Reflection Working Group to plan, execute, and analyze assessment related to the ethical reflection ISLO. Discussion within the Working Group and the Committee at large ensued regarding options for standardized evaluation of students' ability to engage in ethical reflection. Due to the fact that it was a nationally-recognized instrument vetted for viability and reliability with documented national norms and benchmarks, the ISLO selected the Denning Issues Test (DIT-2), an abbreviated version of the original Defining Issues Test (DIT-1), which uses a Likert-type scale to give quantitative rankings to issues surrounding moral dilemmas. More information can be found about the DIT-2 assessment instrument below.

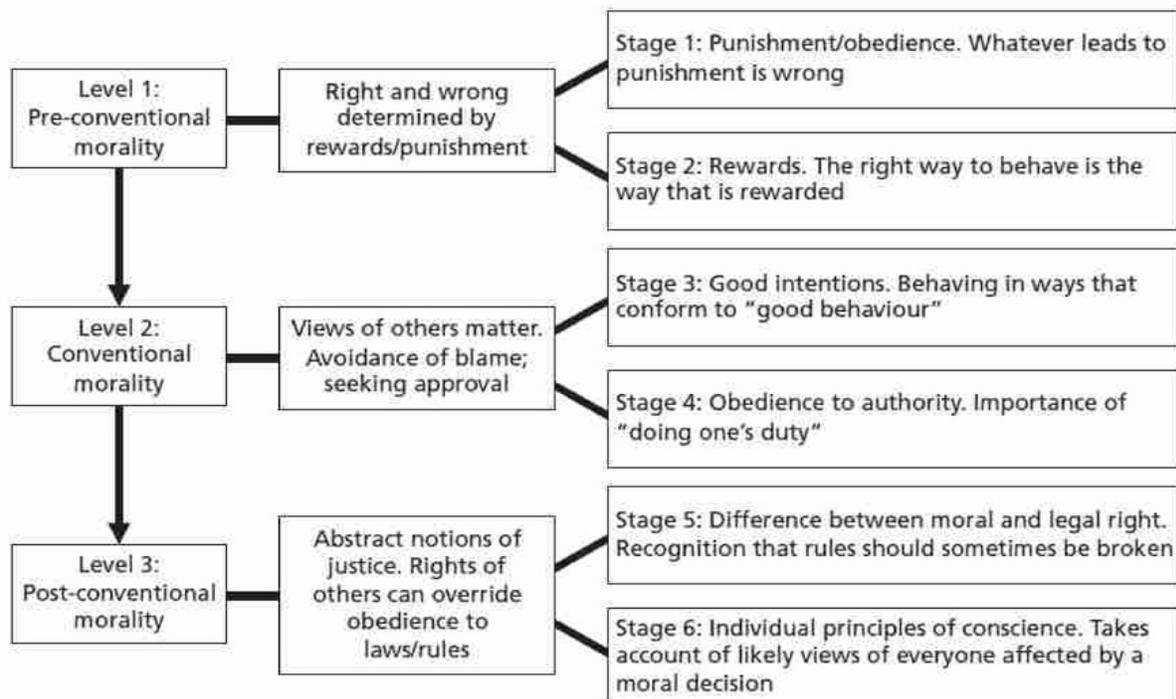
In the fall of 2016, initial data from the DIT-2 was presented to the ISLO Ethical Reflection Working Group (see discussion below). While that data helped determine Gustavus students' baseline level of ethical reflection relative to national normed results, it failed to provide context regarding how the Gustavus experience in particular may have contributed to student performance on the DIT-2. With that in mind, the Working Group discussed supplementing the quantitative DIT-2 data with more in-depth, qualitative analysis and settled on a plan to execute a series of focus groups in the spring of 2017. By reflecting on both the quantitative, norm-referenced data gleaned from the DIT-2 as well as the qualitative observations derived from the Ethical Reflection Focus Groups, the ISLO Ethical Reflection

Working Group successfully established a general sense of students' ability to reflect on ethical issues as well as the ways in which their experience at Gustavus has likely impacted that performance.

## DIT-2 Assessment Instrument

### Background

Gustavus administered the Defining Issues Test, second edition (DIT-2), a validated instrument for measuring levels of moral judgement based on Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning.



### **Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning**

The DIT-2 presents a series of hypothetical conditions followed by a list of issues and moral dilemmas that are rated by participants on a Likert scale. The instrument is administered through the [Center for the Study of Ethical Development](#) at the University of Alabama with scoring provided for both individual and group scores associated with [Kohlberg's stages and several experimental indices](#).

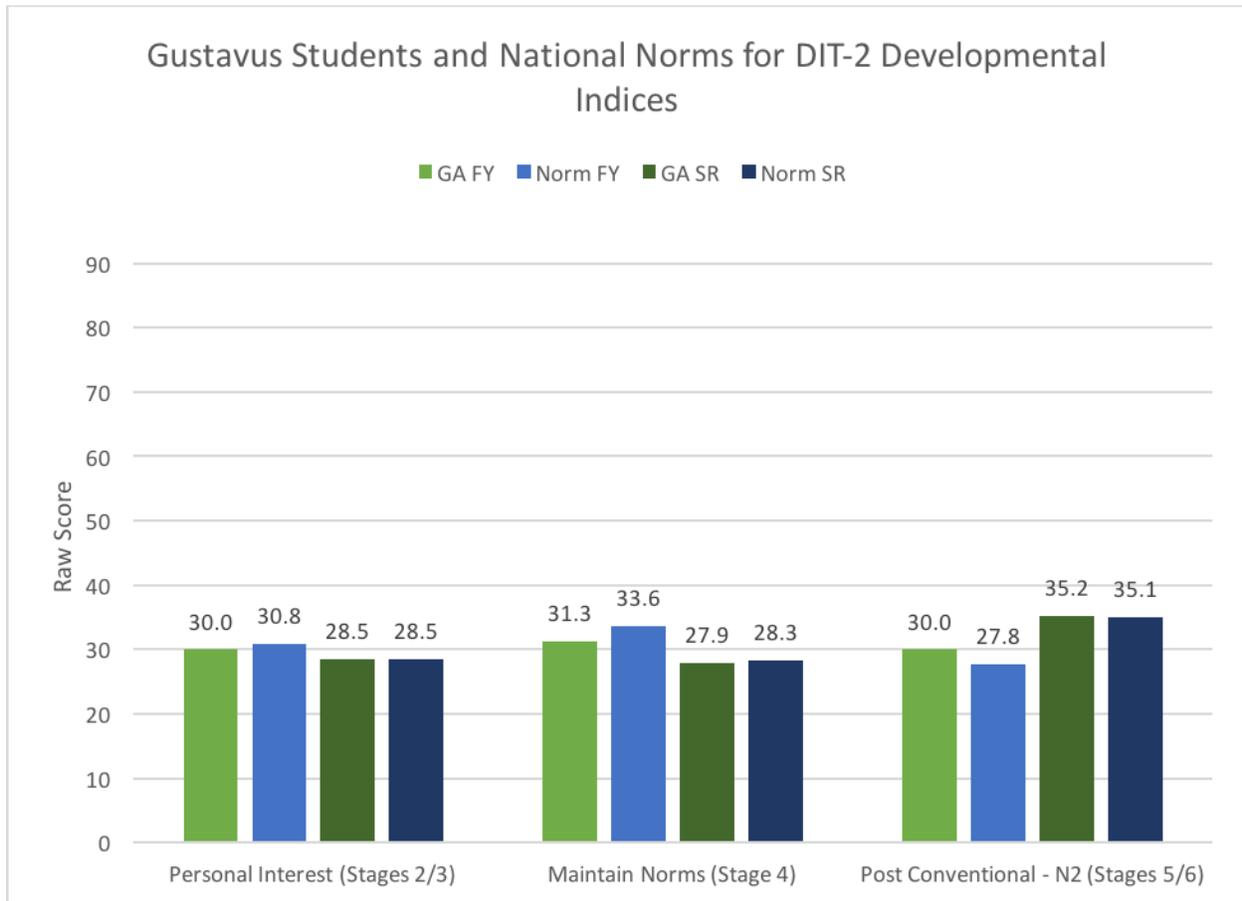
As this was the first cycle for assessing ethical reflection at Gustavus, the data provides a baseline. First-year students (n=223) were recruited through professors volunteering their First-Term Seminar classes in the Fall of 2015 and seniors (n=104) were invited through email in the Spring of 2016. This round of data

collection allowed comparison of first year students and seniors to the national norms. The next cycle will be conducted when this first-year cohort are seniors (Spring 2019) and will also provide us with a longitudinal assessment of our student cohort.

DIT-2 Results and Discussion

**Data**

The chart below presents Developmental Indices comparison data from Gustavus students and the 2009 Norming study for the DIT-2; discussion follows.



**Developmental Indices** – score range is 0-95.

**Personal Interest (Stage 2/3)** is the scoring for responses that reflect one’s support of advantages to the self; higher scores represent results relating to a focus on personal benefits. *Results: Gustavus students in the Personal Interest stage are equivalent to the National norms and follow the expected results with younger participants focusing more on the “self” to base their moral decisions.*

**Maintain Norms (Stage 4)** is the scoring for responses that reflect one's support of societal roles and the legal system; higher scores represent stronger belief in a formal organizational structure. *Results: Gustavus students in the Maintain Norms stage are slightly below the National norms, though the difference is not statistically significant. As with the National norms, younger students scored higher than their stage 2/3 scores and their older counterparts.*

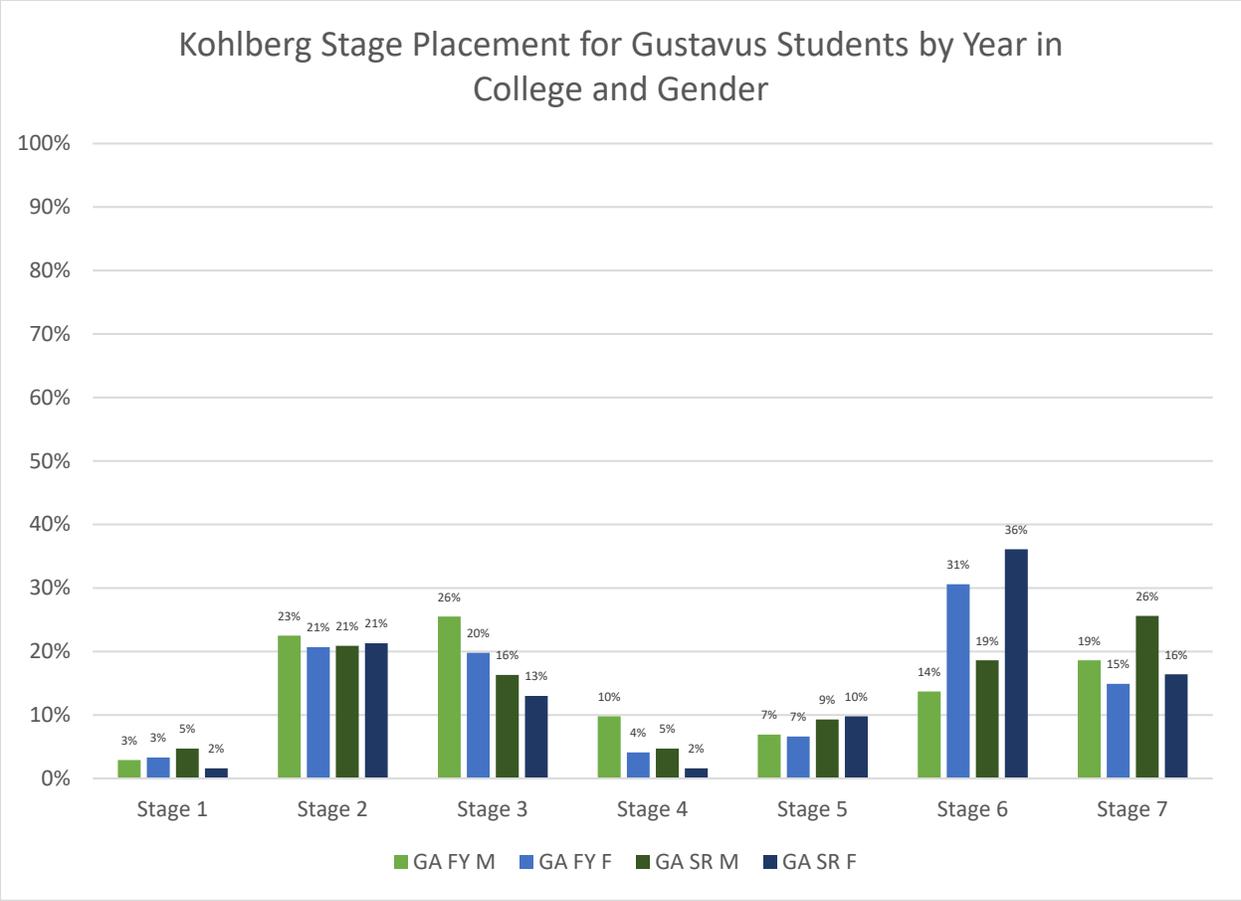
**Post-Conventional Schema (N Score – Stages 5/6)** is the scoring for responses that reflect one's support of community agreement for actions and events through intuitive standards (i.e., due process, majority vote, basic human rights), higher scores represent a strong belief that moral decisions are based on judgements by the collective. *Results: Gustavus students in the Post-Conventional Schema stage scores fell within the range of normed scores with younger students slightly exceeding the National norms.*

### **Developmental Profiles and Phases**

Consolidation/Transition – a measure of responses that defines whether a person is "Transitional" (in between stages) or "Consolidated" (firmly set in a single stage). *Results: The majority of both First-year (76%) and Senior (76%) Gustavus students were scored as "Transitional".*

Utilizer Score – used to measure how much responses scored as most important match up with the respondent's action choice for the story. A higher score indicates a higher consistency within importance and action (range is 0-1). *Results: First-year students (.16) and Seniors (.17) both scored on the lower end of the scoring for consistency between importance and action.*

Type Indicator – indicates which Kohlberg Stage respondents are classified into. Gustavus student results are presented in the following chart. *Results: The pattern of stage placement is as expected (older students higher in stage growth). There are no national norms to use for comparison.*



Variables examined included: study abroad participant, 3 Crowns Curriculum student, major, socio-economic status, and first-generation college student. Due to the small sample size overall, statistical significance could not be found when conducting analysis these subgroups. In the next round of surveying, first year data collected will provide the baseline for measuring growth when these same students are seniors

In summary, compared to National norms, Gustavus students score as expected on the DIT-2. Follow-up testing with the first-year cohort when they are seniors is likely to provide a longitudinal measurement that should be helpful to the institution’s assessment of ethical reasoning.

Further analysis was also conducted through focus groups with students on campus to help explain what role a Gustavus education plays in moral development versus how much of their growth is derived through maturity. It is hoped that these focus groups will help provide information that can be standardized for collection and analysis on future surveys.

**Focus Groups**

## Background

As previously mentioned, the ISLO Ethical Reflection Working Group formulated a plan to elicit student feedback through a series of focus groups, yielding valuable qualitative data to our understanding of how experiences at Gustavus have contributed to how students conceive ethics and reflect on ethical issues. In January 2017, Working Group members developed a qualifying questionnaire to record volunteers' exposure to Gustavus-specific curricular and co-curricular experiences related to ethical reflection as well as a Focus Group Procedure and Questions (see Appendix A). Once those instruments were developed and vetted by the ISLO Assessment Committee, students were invited to participate via email in March 2017. Students indicated their interest by completing the qualifying questionnaire, and communications followed from the Office of the Provost to schedule the focus group sessions themselves. Students, primarily from our junior and senior classes (n=28) indicated interest in participating, but not all were able to commit to the in-person meeting due to scheduling conflicts. A portion of those students indicating initial interest (n=12) participated in one of the one-hour focus groups. While this number falls short of a sample size fully representative of the student body, students experiencing a full range of curricular and co-curricular exposure related to ethical reflection were included.

## Results and Discussion

On April 11 and 12, 2017, the ISLO Ethical Reflections group conducted focus groups to explore student understanding of the concept of "ethics." Twelve students participated throughout three focus group sessions. Questions focused on the students' definition of ethics and where the students see ethical reflection coming into play in their Gustavus experience.

When asked about defining the term "ethics," students generally divided the definition into two parts. First, the concept of moral right and wrong, which they relate to personal conduct and choice; students then regarded ethics as a systematized set of principles that guide to what is right or wrong. Moreover, students recognized and acknowledged a movement from the dualism of "black and white" in ethics to a spectrum of gray areas.

In relation to Gustavus experiences relating to ethics, students cited both curricular and co-curricular opportunities. Curricular opportunities include in-class discussions, readings, and case studies, which assisted students in defining and making hypothetical ethical decisions. Students in the 3 Crowns Curriculum cited the cohort model as helping them engage in deeper, sustained dialogue through their

classroom experiences. Outside of the classroom, students cited many student leadership opportunities and trainings, such as being a Collegiate Fellow, Gustie Greeter, and participating in Community Based Service and Learning programs. Students also discussed outside speakers and lecturers and the annual Nobel Conference as unique opportunities to consider and discuss ethical situations and decision making. Participants who engaged in study abroad opportunities discussed ethical reasoning as they explored other viewpoints and varied experiences in contrast with the perceived homogeneity of the Gustavus campus. In addition to structured opportunities in and out of the classroom, participants talked about conversations with their peers in casual settings, such as in the residence halls or at meals; these conversations often revolved around current national and world events as well as campus on-goings. Students stated unstructured, casual conversations provided a higher sense of comfort, which allowed for them to share more without having their “walls up.”

In closing the focus groups, students were asked to think about their Gustavus experiences and what would improve or continue to allow for a growth in understanding of ethics and ethical decision making. Participants recommended finding more opportunities for training and learning public discourse and respectful dialogue, as it might reduce the fear of students feeling judged or that they have to subscribe to a specific “party line” or side of an ethical discussion. Another recommendation theme that arose was the suggestion to be more explicit about bringing ethical questions to the forefront of opportunities, as opposed to assuming students recognize themes in their classwork, study abroad, and co-curricular experiences.

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Protocol and Questions

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Institutional Student Learning Outcomes

Assessment Committee

Research Study: Impact of Gustavus Experience on Ethical Reflection

#### Procedure for Ethical Reflection ISLO Focus Groups

- As students arrive, please ask them to review and sign the consent forms
- Ask students to prepare name tents with a number written for anonymous identification for note-takers (write number on upper right hand corner of consent form)
- Once students have all arrived and are settled (5-10 minutes past official start time), welcome everyone and introduce yourself
- Ask orally if anyone has questions about the consent forms or objects to the focus group being audio recorded
- Assuming no, let the room know that the audio recording is beginning and that the student scribe(s) will be taking general notes using basic numbered identifiers as indicated on name tent
- Once the audio is rolling, state your name as well as the date, time and function of the session as "Ethical Reflection Focus Group"
- Proceed to rapport-building question followed by reflection questions
- Move through ethical reflection questions, making sure to record robust answers to the questions by utilizing the following techniques:
  - "Can you talk about that more?"
  - "Help me understand what you mean..."
  - "Can you give me an example?"
  - "Thank you. What do other people think?"
  - Paraphrase and/or summarize long, complex or ambiguous comments
- As time concludes, thank participants and wish them well
- Immediately after participants leave, moderator(s) debrief while recorder is still running and label all materials with date and time as appropriate

#### Focus Group Questions

Rapport-building question (we do this to set the tone for inclusiveness and lower affective filter of participants before moving on to topical questions):

- What are you most looking forward to as we move toward the end of spring semester?

Ethical reflection questions:

- How do you define ethics?
- What experiences have helped you develop your definition of ethics?
- Are there experiences during your time at Gustavus that have helped you craft your definition of ethics?
- In what way would you say your ability to reflect on issues of ethics has changed over time?
- What has contributed to those changes?
- To what extent have experiences you've had at Gustavus contributed to your changes in ethical reasoning?
- Would you consider the development of ethical reasoning to be a consistent theme throughout your Gustavus experience?
- Where would you consider this theme most prominent within the context of your experience at Gustavus?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about ethical reasoning or your development therein that you have not yet had the opportunity to share?