

Report from the Academic Planning Subcommittee, May 2006

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In May of 2005 the Faculty Senate formed a pilot subcommittee with appointed representation from the divisions to discuss and make recommendations regarding academic planning as part of a campus-wide planning effort. President Jim Peterson asked the committee to provide a report by the end of the year. In undertaking this task, we have met weekly to examine the context of higher education now and in the near future, to envision what the academic program at the College is and should be, and to propose some initiatives that we feel could enhance that vision. Among the questions we have considered are: what does liberal arts mean at Gustavus? What makes us distinctive? What should our ideal prospective student look like? Our ideal graduate? How can we better support our priorities? What external forces, including changing demographics, do we need to take into account? Our plan reflects provisional and partial answers to these questions, but they are perennial and should be revisited routinely as a regular function of ongoing planning.

We endorse the statement on liberal arts that Interim Dean Eric Eliason drafted as another component of the planning process, working in consultation with our committee. In particular, we emphasize that the liberal arts orientation can and should guide all of what we do, rather than being the province of specific departments or of the general education curricula. This view helps define our approach to academic planning. Rather than focus on “academic programs” in the plural, we speak to “the academic program” in the singular. The question is not which specific majors and other programs should be strengthened, but rather what concrete actions we can collectively take to enhance the academic program as a whole. We also take encouragement from the parallel document on the Lutheran tradition, which Professor Darrell Jodock drafted. That document articulates that faith and inquiry are companions, not competitors, and that reverence for the eternal entails a call to service in the here and now.

We have come to the conclusion that *strengthening student engagement* should be a central theme of our academic plan. As described in the later section on current strengths and challenges, engagement is already a distinguishing feature of the Gustavus experience, though one with plenty of room for enhancement. The College seeks to develop independent students with skills that enable them to see connections among different types of knowledge, between their academic work and the outside world, and to consistently ask big questions as they construct a philosophy of life. Engagement appears to be a critical factor in this kind of learning. It simultaneously builds on the liberal arts and Lutheran traditions, enhances the College’s distinctiveness, and responds to the needs of our prospective students. Our recommendations suggest concrete ways in which hiring, faculty development, and programmatic innovation can support engagement.

1. What do we mean by engagement? An engaged student *questions, connects, and acts.*

An engaged student is constantly *questioning*, whether in the class or out. An engaged student's questions go beyond the factual; they arise from reflection on the topic at hand and its connections with other topics and with life as a whole. Some questions are directed at least partially inward: Who am I? What is the world like? What is my role in that world? How shall I change to better fulfill that role? Other questions explicitly call on others to join in an exploration of multidisciplinary connections or to probe unstated assumptions. The questioning attitude mixes skepticism with curiosity; an engaged student's goal is neither to

shoot down answers nor to accept them as final, but rather to move steadily, but unendingly, toward improved understanding.

An engaged student *connects* with other people as well as connecting academic disciplines with one another and with their social context. An engaged student interacts intellectually with other students. Thoughtful conversation among students, inside the class and out, is a crucial companion to learning from professors. An engaged student also connects with a broader group of people by venturing beyond the boundaries of campus, whether in domestic or international study, internships, volunteer service, or the activities of co-curricular groups and extra-curricular organizations. By connecting with others, an engaged student learns to appreciate other perspectives and becomes better able to play a positive role in the world, fostering peace and justice.

An engaged student *acts* in ways that serve both to carry a portion of that student's understanding into the world and to provide the context in which the student further develops that understanding. An engaged student performs as an artist, whether directly in front of an audience or indirectly by creating a work for later exhibition. An engaged student performs a role in a research project, whether in the laboratory, field, or library, contributing to the ongoing production of knowledge and then sharing that knowledge through poster presentations, seminar talks, or publication. An engaged student performs acts of service, working with others to jointly address the challenges they face. By performing acts like these, an engaged student appreciates that understanding grows through action as well as through reflection, and develops skills that can be turned toward fulfillment of a vocation.

1.2 The engaged faculty

Student engagement is the primary focus of this academic plan; faculty engagement, nonetheless, is an essential component of this plan's success. Faculty engagement is enacted through teaching, advising and mentoring, collaborative research and creativity, campus service, and other avenues. Turning specifically to the relationship between student engagement and faculty engagement, faculty commitment to student learning, inside and outside the classroom, and dedication to mentoring students offers a mutually satisfying and engaging academic environment. Perhaps the primary constraint upon optimal faculty engagement at Gustavus arises from competing time demands, given that recognition and nurturance of each student's abilities and interests requires attentive faculty engagement.

1.3 What the literature says about engagement

A number of studies conducted since 1980 suggest there are two critical components to student learning. First, the time and energy students invest in their education is a strong predictor for learning and personal development. Second, institutional practices that invite students to participate in opportunities for purposeful learning are key, including student-faculty contact, active learning, a respect for diverse ways of knowing, and creating environments that are supportive but where high expectations are clearly communicated (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). According to a recent review of a decade of research, several studies have suggested that "critical thinking, analytic competencies, and general intellectual development thrive in college environments that emphasize close relationships between faculty and students as well as faculty concern about student growth and development" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 600). Other research has

focused on the role of experiential learning and the contribution diversity has on development (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005). Interestingly, there is some evidence that students with relatively low college entrance exam scores stand to gain the most from an environment that supports engagement (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006).

Some of the profound challenges facing teachers and learners today include the growth of knowledge, the blurring of boundaries in interdisciplinary inquiry, the need to develop skills to find and use information rather than remember and repeat it, and changing patterns in student experiences and expectations. According to a review of what cognitive science and neuroscience can tell us about learning, education should focus on “helping students develop the intellectual tools and learning strategies needed to acquire the knowledge that allows people to think productively about history, science and technology, social phenomena, mathematics, and the arts. Fundamental understanding about subjects, including how to frame and ask meaningful questions about various subject areas, contributes to individuals’ more basic understanding of principles of learning that can assist them in becoming self-sustaining, lifelong learners” (National Research Council, 2000, p.5). This has traditionally been the approach taken by liberal arts education.

Some scholarship has focused on the “distinctive” nature of liberal arts colleges as places where engagement flourishes because they are small, residential, and focused on student learning (Lang, 2000). According to Samuel Schuman, small colleges offer rich opportunities for integrated learning: “Student engagement is enhanced by the wide range of opportunities for participation at small colleges and is an important predictor of student success and persistence. In turn, the depth and diversity of involvement in a range of in-class and out-of-class campus activities increases the likelihood that a student will have a cohesive collegiate career” (2005, p. 158).

Yet there is evidence that these things in themselves do not guarantee student learning. One recent study of impacts concludes that students who attend liberal arts colleges are more likely than other students to encounter good teaching and supportive institutional practices. But though those conditions are there, they aren’t always effective: “the proportion of students who *actually* experience these effective practices and conditions at these institutions was not sufficient for them to consistently produce better student outcomes” (Pascarella, Wolniak, Seifert, Cruce, & Blaich, 2005, p. 101). The effort a student makes also plays a critical role. “[A]part from courses taken and instruction received, both knowledge acquisition and general cognitive growth depend in large measure on an individual’s level of academic effort and engagement. Other things being equal, the more students are psychologically engaged in activities such as use of the library, reading unassigned books, individual study, writing papers, and course assignments, the greater their knowledge acquisition and general intellectual growth. If the literature of the 1990s says anything, it is that, although colleges can fashion an undergraduate academic experience characterized by a plethora of learning opportunities, it is the extent to which students become engaged in and fully exploit these opportunities that largely determines the personal benefits they derive” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 613).

2. Current academic strengths and challenges

In considering initiatives that might foster deeper engagement, the subcommittee examined the current academic program, looking for those aspects of it that worked well or held promise. We also considered obstacles to the program, summarized below.

Strengths and Distinctions	Challenges
FTS (small class size, interdisciplinary, develops critical college skills)	Perhaps tries to do too much, too soon; always a challenge to offer enough sections.
Faculty view teaching as a primary focus (high interest in teaching and learning issues; criteria for promotion and tenure emphasize excellence in teaching)	Course load and some class sizes are too high, increasing the challenge of engaging students in and outside the classroom.
General Education (a choice of two curricula; both emphasize the range and variety of ways of knowing)	Curriculum I does little to encourage students to think about connections; junior and senior students sometimes fail to take challenging courses to fulfill requirements; implicitly defers "important work" to the majors.
Interdisciplinary course offerings (provide a model for seeking connections; co-teaching provides and enriching experience for faculty; may attenuate a "major-centric" focus)	Cross-listing courses can be challenging; the opportunity to co-teach varies across departments.
Majors (faculty and students strongly identify with their major/department; as a community, the department and its curriculum provides significant opportunities for intellectual and personal development)	Strong identification with a particular major may interfere with developing an appreciation of connections across disciplines or the integration of liberal learning.
Study abroad program (wide variety of programs; India & Germany programs "owned" by Gustavus; new re-entry program is designed to integrate experience)	Would like to see more students spend a semester abroad; challenging to manage costs; need for greater integration into general education and majors.
Community service, service learning (significant increase in SL courses in the last 10 years; wide variety of programs; many student-initiated programs)	Integration of service learning into courses takes time and effort; some students don't take advantage of the opportunities offered.
Student-faculty research, scholarship, and creativity opportunities (strong correlation to graduate school acceptance success; many majors offer research-oriented honors programs)	Need for greater support for faculty and students in the form of grants; faculty should get "credit" for the intensive work they do with students as part of their teaching load.
Career services, internships, career explorations (significant increase in participation in internships and career explorations; wide variety of opportunities)	Students don't always take advantage of services; many faculty don't see the value of their participation as advisors or aren't sure how they can contribute effectively.
Many opportunities for involvement in organizations and activities on campus. (Student Affairs staff are exploring a program to encourage students to reflect on those activities that will support their learning and personal growth in a more intentional way.)	Students vary greatly in their co-curricular involvement, from totally uninvolved to overcommitted; we haven't done a good job of fostering reflective involvement in co-curriculars and involvement with connections to the rest of the academic program.

Reading in Common program (consistent use of program for the last 5 years; it's a good partnership opportunity with Student Affairs).	Purpose of the program is contested (is it an academic task, preparation for adjustment to college, or something more?); largely limited to an orientation discussion and an author event; most FTS faculty do not assign the text. How well this program succeeds in creating a common intellectual experience has not been evaluated.
Interdisciplinary programs (most programs have a strong contingent of interested faculty; the programs have the potential to be distinctive).	Faculty participation is hard to balance with department commitments; student interest is uneven; programs may not seem practical or may seem "too political"
Faculty mentoring (most faculty report valuing close relationships with students; many students report valuable mentoring relationships with faculty. The research on engagement suggests that close student/faculty contact is strongly correlated with student learning).	Advising role is sometimes seen as a paperwork exercise rather than a mentoring opportunity; the College may not be clear in communicating to faculty that advising is a priority; faculty may worry about advising/mentoring becoming "handholding" that actually discourages students from taking responsibility for their own decision-making.
Writing across the curriculum (new guidelines reduce class size and two separate W designations have clarified the program's purpose; wide variety of courses/participation).	Teaching load limits the faculty's ability to engage in substantial feedback and discussion of writing issues; lack of time for faculty to develop their own skills as writing teachers.

2.1 External challenges

We also reviewed the challenges facing higher education generally in the next decade, and liberal arts colleges in the upper Midwest particularly, in considering our recommendations.

An academic plan must consider the nature of the anticipated applicant pool that the plan would hope to attract and the student population that the plan would serve. The committee examined the changing nature of the student demographic pool from which Gustavus has drawn in recent decades. According to a report from the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation (2004), the total number of Minnesota high school graduates is projected to decrease by 10.3% (with a 3.3% drop in the Midwest region generally) by 2013. In Minnesota, the number of graduates who were traditionally most likely go on to college will decline as the number of minority high school graduates is expected to increase 51.9%. At the same time, demand for graduates with bachelor degrees will rise. "[B]y 2010 Minnesota will not be producing enough college graduates to meet the total workforce demands of replacing retirees and filling new positions. And by 2015, the state will not be producing enough graduates even to replace the retirees, with no room for economic growth whatsoever" (p. iii).

It appears that the College cannot reasonably anticipate that it will continue to draw the same number of applicants from the same pools from the same region. The committee does not view this transformation in a negative light; indeed, the next ten years afford the college inspiring opportunities, especially as regional demand for graduates will increase. One or more of the following options are likely to prevail: (1) continue our present-day approaches to attracting applicants, recognizing that Gustavus and similar institutions will compete in an applicant pool that will likely shrink by at least 10%; (2) expand our applicant pool to include substantial numbers of regional high school students in the minority populations that are projected to increase; and/or (3) significantly broaden the geographic scope of our applicant pool beyond its primary scope of the upper Midwest. The committee does not believe that a decision on future admissions practices and goals is within its purview. At the same time, the committee recognizes that a well-crafted academic plan will take into account potential changes in the student population it attracts and serves.

Emphasizing engagement is relevant regardless of the option the College pursues. If we choose to continue to compete in a pool that shrinks, we will need a competitive edge; the engagement-centric plan could provide it. If we choose to pursue students from groups that do not have a history of attending college, we need to both catch their attention (because their families don't have an already-established relationship with Gustavus, unlike many of our current students) and provide a program likely to ensure their perseverance and success (because they are likely to face greater challenges). Our engagement-centric plan could do those things. If we choose to broaden our geographic reach, we will need to do something distinctive so as to catch the attention of people outside our name-recognition zone. New initiatives that strengthen engagement could facilitate this.

3. Recommendations

The Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Academic Planning recommends that beginning in the fall of 2006, the Faculty Senate assign the initiatives detailed in this report to the appropriate faculty and college committees with the charge that they report to either the Senate or the full faculty no later than February 2007. Most of the initiatives, if adopted, will not be fully implemented for some time; however, the community should evaluate these recommendations and, if accepted, implement them in a timely manner.

Thoughtful deliberation and discussion of the initiatives will serve to draw even greater numbers of the community into the conversation on academic planning, as well as increase the participation of potential stakeholders in decision-making about the future of each recommended initiative. An additional benefit is the engagement of the faculty and the staff in creating, molding, and implementing curricular outcomes.

3.1 Staffing for engagement

Deans and the Provost will make critical resource allocation decisions each time they create or fill a faculty position. In order to align those decisions with our plan, the Academic Affairs leadership will need to examine each position with the goal of engagement in mind.

Engagement is fostered in part through reasonable class sizes and advising loads; some positions may be favored on these simple, quantitative grounds. However, positions will also differ in other, more qualitative ways. Is there reason to believe the faculty member will be particularly involved in mentoring students in

research, scholarship, or creativity? Will the teaching responsibilities include service learning, travel courses, or internship supervision? Engagement entails also making connections across disciplinary boundaries. As recognized by the faculty through a resolution brought forward by the Curriculum Committee in April 2006, faculty positions should include support for extra-departmental needs such as the First Term Seminar, interdisciplinary studies, and Curriculum II programs.

The Academic Affairs leadership should consider these issues not only on a case-by-case basis, but also by periodically taking stock from a longer-term, broader perspective. This broader perspective should include collaboration with the College's other senior leadership on resource allocation between faculty and other needs.

Although staffing decisions reflect in a fundamental way our priorities as a college, they can only effect gradual, incremental change in who we are. Therefore, if the college's academic program is to be strengthened in the short term, we will need to change what those of us already at the college do. Rather than simply exhorting those of us already present to be more engaging, the remaining recommendations outline some concrete initiatives that would serve to realize that goal.

3.2 Project-based learning with showcase days

Many students at the College are already engaged in projects with results that can be presented, exhibited, or performed. These include such major works as senior exhibitions, theses, recitals, and student-directed one-act plays, but also more modest projects done even in 100-level courses, such as independent projects that currently lead to in-class poster sessions. The goal of this initiative is to make such project-based learning a more prominent part of every student's Gustavus experience both by increasing its pervasiveness in both lower- and upper-division courses and by increasing the attention paid to the results, including across disciplinary boundaries.

This initiative will involve the faculty in sponsoring project-based learning opportunities; newly created opportunities would primarily be within courses. It would also involve the students in availing themselves of those opportunities. This participation by faculty and students might be ratcheted up from the current level on a purely voluntary basis, just by increasing the amount of attention paid to this style of learning and in particular through the creation of one or two campus-wide showcase days each year in which the results would be exhibited, presented, or performed. Another mechanism that might help to increase participation would be faculty development efforts targeted at supporting faculty members incorporating project-based learning into their courses.

Alternatively, it may be appropriate to go beyond a purely voluntary system to an explicit curricular requirement, perhaps akin to the current writing requirement. That is, individual courses could be designated as PBL (Project-Based Learning) to indicate that they contain a student-engagement project with a visible or audible outcome. Students could be required to complete some number of PBL-designated courses. For example, it might be appropriate to require one PBL course in the first two years at Gustavus and one in the last two. Such a requirement could be a powerful encouragement for PBL to be viewed as equally appropriate for sophomores as for seniors. Further complexity could be introduced to the requirement to encourage a mix of projects inside and outside of the students' majors; however, the advantages would need to be carefully weighed against the inherent disadvantage of complexity.

One interesting question is whether a system of incentives could be put in place to encourage interdisciplinary projects. The simplest incentive might be a

policy that encourages a single project to count for credit in two different courses if it appropriately cuts across their topics.

In addition to the many open questions regarding the project-based learning initiative itself, the campus-wide showcase days would also require careful design. One significant question is how to ensure that most students choose to attend, rather than viewing these days as "days off," the way Nobel Conference is all too often viewed. The primary solution to that problem seems to be ensuring that a large proportion of the student body is presenting, including students in their earlier years as well as their later. If they need to be on campus to present, they will also be able to wander around to the other students' presentations, including across disciplinary boundaries – provided that the logistics of the showcase days is such that presenters are not pinned down for the entire duration. Once there is a large enough critical mass, even those who are not presenting may well stick around and support their friends.

The opposite problem of critical mass is overcrowding. Even with two showcase days per year, they cannot be expected to absorb the entire year's worth of performances, such as the recitals that fill many weekends. Choices will need to be made by the relevant faculty regarding what should move to the showcase days and what should remain in its current more spread-out format. In some cases it may be appropriate for a single student to make use of both formats, such as by scheduling a full-length recital outside of the showcase days but also performing a short excerpt from the recital program during one of the showcase days.

If the Faculty Senate chooses to endorse this academic planning initiative, it would be appropriate for the Senate to make request of, or issue charges to, various groups to plan and carry out the initiative; examples include the following:

- 3.2.1 The Faculty Development Committee might be asked to work together with the Faculty Development Coordinators to develop support for those faculty members who are revising courses to incorporate project-based learning.
- 3.2.2 The Curriculum Committee might be asked to consider whether an explicit requirement should be introduced, and if so in what form. If the decision is to avoid introducing a requirement, this committee might consider what alternative mechanisms could encourage participation.
- 3.2.3 The Academic Affairs office might be asked to coordinate the showcase days, including initiating conversations with those groups and departments on campus that already engage in similar activities that might be incorporated.
- 3.2.4 The Program Assessment and Development Committee might be asked to consider whether it would be appropriate to include any measurement of student participation in the institutional assessment plan, and if so how this might be achieved.

3.3 Integrated concentration

This initiative aims to provide an opportunity for students (and faculty) to explore more explicitly connections that might occur across disciplinary boundaries. The idea is to require students to develop (with the help of a faculty advisor) an integrated concentration that would encourage a more thoughtful

selection of courses to meet the general education requirements. Students during their sophomore year would propose in writing a concentration of their own development that would most likely complement their major area of study but might also allow them to develop an academic pursuit completely outside their major. The concentration would require X number of classes from X number of departments (not including the major). It might be useful to limit the number of 100 level courses one could include in the concentration to discourage the current trend toward sampling introductory courses without further exploration in the corresponding discipline. An experiential component (study abroad, domestic travel, internships, service learning) might be included in the concentration with the idea that doing so could facilitate more thoughtful integration of such experiences into students' academic experience.

This initiative is intended to foster engagement in several ways. First, requiring an integrated concentration would ensure students are more deeply engaged in their own educational planning. As a consequence they should be less likely to see general education requirements as obstacles to their major and more likely to see them as possibilities for enhancing their major or satisfying their own intellectual curiosity or desire for creative thinking. Second, the initiative would encourage students to look for connections across classes and more importantly across disciplines. Furthermore, it is assumed that having students who must think about connections could in turn encourage faculty to do so as well as they think about how best to assist their students in their roles as advisor and teacher. Finally, an integrated concentration might lead students to be more reflective during their classes by examining whether and how the current course material relates to that of their major, concentration, and other proposed classes. In short, the integrated concentration would ideally encourage students to think about whether and how various disciplines and modes of inquiry fit together as they plan their coursework, as they take their courses, and as they reflect upon their experiences outside of the classroom.

Whereas this initiative could result in increased advising time for faculty, one would assume that the time would be spent in more thoughtful, student-initiated conversations that would be more satisfying for both students and advisors. The question of whether and how integrated concentrations would be "approved" needs to be addressed. One interesting possibility is that the approval process itself might be an interesting vehicle for student and faculty representatives from across departments to get together to think about sophomores' proposed connections. Another question is whether there is a way for students to "cap" their concentration in some way that requires them to reflect on the connections they aimed to explore at the outset. Perhaps there is a way to weave this need with the portfolio project described below and with the project-based learning and showcase day initiative (although this raises an additional set of questions: who advises these cap experiences? how does one assign credit? etc.)

If the Faculty Senate endorses this proposal it may want to forward it to:

- 3.3.1 The Curriculum Committee, for further discussion on how this would be incorporated into our current curricular plan and ways to codify the parameters of such an initiative.
- 3.3.2 The Academic Operations Committee, which oversees the advising of students, and could assist in developing the advising component of the plan.

- 3.3.3 A sub-committee of these two previous committees, including representatives from the Advising Center and Registrar's Office, that could craft final recommendations derived from the committees.

3.4 Reflection and integration through student portfolios

In addition to developing knowledge and skills, our academic program should help students develop an understanding of who they are, what the world is, and what their place in the world is. The pieces are all there, but reflective integration of those pieces is left up to the individual without much in the way of scaffolding, except for departments and programs with an integrative capstone experience (such as Curriculum II). All students need opportunities to reflect on the "big questions" and should be able to relate what they are learning to life beyond Gustavus. They also should be able to present themselves and what they have accomplished to the world effectively.

One way to encourage such integration is through making available to students an opportunity to build personal portfolios. An integrative portfolio could include a reflective essay that discusses the portfolio contents and reflects on the big questions: Who am I? What is the world like? What is my role in that world? It could also include samples of their best work in different classes as well as out of class. In a sense, the portfolio itself becomes response to those big questions, because it pulls together personal reflection and artifacts that demonstrate academic engagement with the world of ideas, and provides an imaginative space for the student to think about how they will take their place in the world.

Students could use the process of developing an online portfolio to reflect on their own growth during their years at Gustavus and to share the work of which they are most proud with others who may be interested – including their families, friends, and teachers. Academic advisors could use the portfolio as a way to gain insight into the student's experiences, providing opportunities for conversations about meaningful integration of ideas and personal values. In the senior year, this portfolio could become the basis of a public expression of preparedness for whatever path the student plans to take post-graduation, helping the student connect their academic experience to the world - and the world to their experiences.

If the Faculty Senate should decide to pursue this initiative, it may wish to do the following:

- 3.4.1 Ask the Faculty Committee on Student Life to explore the creation of a pilot project. The Committee could establish a task force with representatives from the faculty, students, the Career Center, the Center for Vocational Reflection, Academic Advising, and any other entities that would seem to be logical stakeholders. Departments that have experience with student portfolios could provide insights, and the e-portfolio projects at the many institution that are already using electronic portfolios could also be examined.
- 3.4.2 Ask the IIAC to provide assistance with determining the best platform for this pilot project; though there is one already freely available and easy to use (efolio Minnesota, a publicly-funded resource available to the entire state at <http://www.efoliominnesota.com>), there are other approaches that may be better adapted to our needs. (For example, the Mellon Foundation has funded development of Open Source Portfolio software, partially developed at the University of Minnesota.)

3.5 Required off-campus experiences

To fully, liberally educate our students and to prepare them for lives of service beyond Gustavus we must provide opportunities for them to interact and engage with the world. Students must be exposed to a wide range of ideas, attitudes, and cultures to enable them to imagine a world beyond what they know as an individual. They need to be freed to think critically about their own lives, habits and origins and to learn how to be open about receiving new truths and perspectives. Although a small college campus can set the groundwork for many of these things to occur, students must also be allowed to explore these things independently and then have the opportunity reflect on them communally. Many of our students are already involved in these types of activities. This initiative would simply allow them to organize and reflect on them in a more structured way.

Though our mission includes deepening students' understanding of local and global community, to promote justice, and to work for peace (and in support of those goals we have, among other things, a strong Community Service program and a long-standing Peace Studies program), the most recent senior survey (2005) suggests we aren't achieving those goals as broadly as we could. Though 90.4% of responding seniors felt they gained a broad general education about different fields of knowledge, only 60.5% felt Gustavus helped them understand U.S. cultures, 65% felt Gustavus helped them develop an international perspective, and 53.5% felt Gustavus helped them understand peace/justice issues.

This initiative calls for students to demonstrate that they have had off-campus experiences prior to graduation. This might include off campus travel for a semester or January term, career explorations and internships, off-campus service learning projects or significant off-campus volunteer experiences. It would be up to the faculty to determine what would constitute the appropriate length or breath of experiences. From these experiences we could expect that students would have an opportunity to demonstrate independence and responsibility, integrate classroom learning into real world environments, engage in topical discussion outside of the classroom environment, practice problem-solving, and reflect on their learning.

If the Faculty Senate should decide to pursue this initiative, it may wish to do the following:

- 3.5.1 Direct the International and Experiential Education Committee to investigate and recommend guidelines for implementing this initiative. That committee should consult with individual stakeholders across campus such as the Director of January Term, Director of International Education, Associate Dean for Multicultural Programs, Director of Internships, Director of Community Service and Service Learning, Director of the Center for Vocational Reflection, and the Registrar.
- 3.5.2 Apprise the relevant committees of the possibilities for connections between this initiative and the portfolio and integrated concentration initiatives already detailed in this report. Care should be taken so that all parties are aware of the inter-relatedness of these initiatives and, although we encourage them to be worked on simultaneously, we would support also implementing a strategy to facilitate dialogue between committees as they work.
- 3.5.3 The Budget Committee should consider increasing support for Community Service, the Internship Program, and International Education in view of an

increasing demand on their services and their contribution to an enhanced focus on engagement.

3.6 Student-initiated, student-faculty co-led, and student-led Interim Experiences

The faculty should consider increasing student engagement in the planning and execution of Interim Experiences. The degree of engagement could be at any point on a spectrum. Already a motivated student can suggest a topic to a faculty member. That could be expanded to a somewhat more inclusive notion of a "student-initiated" Experience in which the student would also take some initiative in suggesting possible course activities and in recruiting student participants. A higher level of engagement would be for a team of one student and one faculty member to co-lead the Experience. Finally, it would be possible for a student, under appropriately limited circumstances, to take complete responsibility for leading an Interim Experience.

This range of possibilities will require careful examination and consideration. Other institutions have already gone down these paths, and it will be appropriate to learn from their successes and failures. If carefully thought through, there is tremendous potential for student engagement. However, the faculty will need to be careful to structure the process so as to avoid pitfalls. The two major areas of concern are that we could appear to be available on demand ("we're willing to lead, or co-lead, any Experience you design") and that we could wind up with a chaotic, unaccountable mess that devalues expertise. Those pitfalls are reasons to be very intentional in designing the program, but it would be a shame if anxiety about these risks prevented us from embracing the possibility of our students rising to a new level of responsibility.

If the Faculty Senate should decide to pursue this initiative, it may wish to do the following:

- 3.6.1 Pass the suggestion along to the Curriculum Committee for deliberation. The committee may wish to include the Director of Community Service in discussions of student-initiated Experiences that have a service learning component. These insights could be distilled into a report shared with the Academic Operations Committee.
- 3.6.2 Recommend that the Faculty Committee on Student Life discuss this proposal with representatives from Student Affairs and Residential Life to gain their perspectives on the Interim Experience.

3.7 Faculty modeling interdisciplinary curiosity through visiting each other's courses

With extremely little investment, members of the faculty can model for students the idea that courses outside their discipline are exciting opportunities worth taking interest in, as opposed to requirements to fulfill. Likewise, they can model the process of looking for cross-disciplinary connections. All that is required is for each of us to make a point of visiting some other class in some other area once a semester and then the next day talk briefly in our own classes about how interesting we found it and what connections (if any) we see to our own discipline. Already this happens sporadically; however, most of us never quite get beyond good intentions unless we have explicit motivation, such as conducting a Personnel Committee review.

To increase this display of interest beyond its current level, the appropriate initiative would be to put in place a purely voluntary system of participation that is supported by administrative mechanisms for matchmaking and reminders. Those participating would still contact one another directly to ask whether a visit was welcome, and when a good day would be, in keeping with current standards of collegiality. The matchmaking support would simply lower the psychological barrier somewhat compared with the current necessity to make a "cold call" to a colleague to ask about visiting.

If the Faculty Senate should decide to pursue this proposal it may wish to:

- 3.7.1 Recommend the Faculty Development Coordinators put a registration system into place, maintained through the Faculty Development Center. Registrants would receive a list of faculty interested in exchange visits and participants would receive regular, personalized reminders of the program. This program would be publicized along with other faculty development opportunities.

4. Additional questions and issues to consider

As we met throughout the year, a number of issues surfaced that fall outside the scope and timeframe of the Subcommittee. We include these here so the Faculty Senate can consider whether or not any of them warrant further investigation or action.

4.1 How can engagement be presented to prospective and incoming students? The studies cited earlier in this report suggest the initiative students take in their own learning is key to their academic and personal growth in college. Are there ways our commitment to engagement could be integrated effectively into marketing and recruitment of new students? Are there current practices that should be revisited in order to encourage engagement and highlight our best practices?

Students often report that they were initially attracted to Gustavus because of its intimate size, its friendliness, and the sense that they are entering a supportive and nurturing environment. Could we reframe this valued supportiveness in terms that are more expressive of students' responsibility for their own learning and of our faith that they are capable of great things? Can we transform the ways we offer support and provide assistance that will emphasize the students' contribution to their own learning and personal development? For example, there are essential residential and social interaction functions that are best served during the orientation period; a substantive academic experience during this period would invite students to recognize the fundamental place of academics within their college experience and the importance of their own contribution to their learning. How can faculty be involved in practical and helpful ways in incorporating this message into orientation? Are there ways the faculty could build stronger partnerships between Student Affairs and academic life generally?

4.2 How will the background and preparation of future professors change?

While we have some solid information on our students' changing demographics, there is little information available that will help us predict what the pool of new faculty will be like. What sort of competition for talented faculty will we face from liberal arts colleges and other kinds of institutions? Which proclivities for engaged learning in a liberal arts environment will newly-degreed faculty bring with them, and which will we have to nurture? A careful consideration of faculty trends will be

needed, analogous to the analysis of student demographics conducted by the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation.

4.3 How can the physical domain of the campus encourage engagement?

The built environment provides potent symbolic language as well as practical functionality that influences learning and development in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. College buildings and the spaces within and surrounding them should be designed, maintained, and renovated in ways that facilitate engaged learning. What kind of information can we gather systematically from faculty, students, and staff about spatial and functional environments that inhibit or encourage engagement? What planning and decision-making mechanisms could ensure that engagement becomes a guiding principle in designing and maintaining our physical plant? (Similar questions could be asked by the Web Advisory Board of our virtual environment.)

4.4 How will we know if our students are engaged – and whether engagement is the proper focus for our efforts?

The Program Assessment and Development Committee is charged with assisting and advising departments and programs. Who has responsibility for assessing the success of adopting broad academic guiding principles such as the one we are proposing? It does not belong to a specific program or department, or indeed only to Academic Affairs, but has implications across campus. The results of comprehensive assessment projects such as the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education and the Teagle-funded study of writing, critical thinking, and civic engagement currently under way will be informative, but we will need to consider additional ways to assess engagement and its value as a focal point.

4.5. How can general education continue to evolve? Once some experience is gained with the most recent revision of the general education curricula, the overall topic of general education should be revisited, including not only possible further revisions to Curricula I and II, but also alternative proposals, such as integrated, core, or clustered approaches. This reconsideration should also draw upon the current review of the First Term Seminar program and should explore alternatives such as developing more commonality among seminars.

4.6 How can we make the value of the liberal arts visible? How can we distinguish the value of a Gustavus education in particular? The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2002, 2005) found that agreement is emerging among business and civic leaders as well as scholars and accreditation bodies about the important outcomes of a practical liberal education, but this emerging consensus is largely invisible to the public. A recent study found that high school students could not adequately define the term “liberal arts education” and, indeed, had many incorrect assumptions about its meaning (Humphries & Davenport, 2005). In an era of shrinking public support for higher education, what can we do to publicize the practical value of a liberal arts education? Further, as private and public institutions compete for students, how can we distinguish what happens here from other options? One idea that caught the Subcommittee’s imagination was the potential for finding fresh significance in the College’s Swedish, immigrant roots. Could we intentionally set out to support new immigrants as a role uniquely suited to our heritage and consistent with the concern for social equity that is part of Swedish cultural traditions? Such a direction would have significant resource implications, but may be worth exploring. In any case, we need to find new ways to articulate to prospective students and their parents – and to society at large – the value a liberal arts education has for students and their world.

4.7 How can we continue the planning process? We found it enlightening to meet with students, faculty, and members of various units outside academic affairs throughout the year. As a college, we would do well to be more intentional about meeting across boundaries routinely to share what we're doing and what challenges we face in common. Perhaps the Faculty Development Program could initiate a series of informal brown-bag lunch conversations with staff from Admissions, Residential Life, Integrated Marketing, and other campus units so we can be better informed about each others' efforts. The Subcommittee also found it effective to provide information about our work-in-progress to the community throughout the year to keep stakeholders informed. We recommend that other groups on campus adopt this practice of sharing information about ideas and programs as they evolve in order to develop a better campus-wide, shared understanding of where we're headed and what the issues are.

The Subcommittee has completed the task with which it has been charged and, with this work done, our status as a pilot subcommittee of the Faculty Senate comes to an end. We found it worthwhile to consider the broad issues of liberal arts education in changing times and to envision specific initiatives that might address the challenges we identified. We believe this sort of planning should occur, in concert with campus-wide planning, in an organized and regular fashion. Toward that end, the Senate may wish to reconstitute an academic planning subcommittee every three to five years to take stock of the situation, assess challenges, and to imagine solutions.

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Additional resources consulted by the subcommittee during the planning process can be found on the committee's Web site:

<http://www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/facultysenate/committees/academicplanning/>