

# English Language Learners and Generation 1.5 Students at Gustavus

**PREPARING ALL OF OUR STUDENTS FOR A LIFE OF LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY**

In April 2008, the Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan that makes clear its commitment to five core values: Excellence, Community, Justice, Service, and Faith. That document makes clear that to live up to these commitments, we must realize a specific vision for Gustavus – one that provides the highest quality education to all our students and demands that students bring rich perspectives to their engagement with the world. The vision statement also recommends that we “draw on the assets of our region” as we educate students and model compassionate, ethical, and effective action within local communities (*Gustavus Adolphus College Vision Statement, 2008*).

Several points in the vision statement are particularly relevant: 1. Faculty and staff must work together to provide high quality educational experiences; 2. Graduating students should be prepared to lead within their communities and to engage with the world; and 3. We must look to the rich assets of the Southern Minnesota River Valley – its increasingly diverse cultures and peoples – and ensure that the College community engages with the local community in meaningful, ethical ways. Collectively, these points suggest Gustavus’s readiness to recognize the increasing diversity of the local community and the critical need to engage students, faculty, and staff with global concerns. Unless we do so, we will not be able to provide the highest quality education for our students.

The Commission Gustavus 150 process echoed and magnified these concerns. In particular, the “Cultural Perspectives” portion of the final recommendations makes clear that Gustavus must work not only to attract and retain a more culturally and racially diverse student body, faculty, and staff, but that the College must work harder to ensure both retention and academic achievement for diverse students already on campus. The commitment to attracting, retaining, and supporting a more diverse student body is clear throughout the Commission Gustavus 150 documents. In short, we no longer need to make the argument that Gustavus needs to do this work. Instead, it’s time to develop a plan for how this work will be done.

In our work as a committee, we focused on the needs of a specific group of both current and prospective Gustavus students: English Language Learners (ELLs). For this document’s purposes, we define ELLs as students (and faculty) who do not speak English as their first language and/or those for whom English is not the primary language spoken at home. This includes multilingual students, often first generation college goers whose parents are immigrants to the United States, students who are immigrants, and international students who choose to study at Gustavus via study abroad programs. This group often includes Generation 1.5 students, usually described as students who have experienced some, if not all, of their education prior to Gustavus in the United States, but have grown up in a home where English is not the primary language spoken. All face unique challenges as learners and residents on our campus and need our support.

Within the Linguistics field, scholars stress that ELLs are a diverse group for disparate reasons. Furthermore, labels such as ELL or Generation 1.5 can be restrictive in their utility and scope. For example, scholar Linda Harklau describes Generation 1.5 students as “educated English language learners [ELLs]” and emphasizes that their educational background and level of English proficiency often vary. She points out that some “may see themselves as bilingual,” but not all will fall into this category (Harklau <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-4/writing.htm>). Finally, Harklau notes that, regardless of their English proficiency outside of the academy, they may face unique challenges with academic writing which “requires familiarity with complex linguistic structures and rhetorical styles that are not typically used in everyday social interactions” (Harklau <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-4/writing.htm>).

Due to demographic changes, the Generation 1.5 population is the one most likely to increase exponentially in the next decade. At the same time, the College’s desire to increase the number of international students means we must pay attention to the needs of all ELLs.

To begin, we want to emphasize the need for information as well as resources. The ELL Action Committee clearly realized that we do not have a full picture of our students and their needs because we do not collect the type of data that will bring them into view. Thus, one of our plan’s most important parts involve extensive and rigorous data collection, identification of data needs and creation of a means to share resources with the community.

To meet the needs of all ELLs at Gustavus, regardless of their academic preparation, we need to focus our efforts on two major areas: faculty and staff development, and student support. This two-pronged approach is important because simply concentrating our attention on student support – advising, tutoring and mentoring – doesn’t necessarily do anything to help prepare the College as a whole to meet these students’ needs or to benefit from their presence. Preparing faculty and staff to work productively with ELLs creates an environment in which these students can thrive. At the same time, we construct an environment that views diversity as an asset for native English speakers and/or members of the majority culture.

But we cannot think about the needs of the faculty, staff, and the students in isolation. We have to put those needs within a larger context, one that includes the families that send students to us, their communities, and the Saint Peter area. Thus, our recommendations also address ways to build outreach efforts and support mechanisms for parents of current and prospective students, and to enable connections with cultural groups, such as community centers and multilingual congregations.

## STRATEGIES/BIG CATEGORIES

### I. Gathering and Sharing Data

*Developing a systematic, consistent, on-going mechanism of gathering and sharing data about Generation 1.5/ELLs and their needs.*

Fostering success for ELLs requires modifying our pedagogy and practice. The 2010 *Academic Strategic Plan* and earlier documents suggest developing and embracing a multicultural learning

environment. Community members may not yet understand how to do this, because we lack a fully-developed picture of ELLs and their needs. The existing academic literature highlights problems that ELLs may confront, including: inadequate preparation in high school, poor listening comprehension, confusion of cultural idioms in exams and assignments, increased familial pressure for narrowly defined academic success, cultural differences between community living practices and mainstream society, and ineffective communication between college support programs and students and their parents. Faculty and staff at Gustavus range from being unaware of such challenges to addressing such issues with ineffective or even deleterious practices. For instance, the 2010 ELL committee discovered that many Gustavus faculty and staff mistakenly believe that other offices were addressing issues related to ELLs. In reality, none of the personnel directly charged with attracting, retaining and educating ELLs have the support and resources to track demographic, social and/or learning outcomes. Knowing such outcomes is not only a part of the College's mission but it is also vital to funding, disciplinary review and accreditation programs. Purposeful data collection and analysis would not only transform Gustavus from a typical (and thus unsupportive of ELLs) college to a leader in ensuring the postsecondary academic success of ELLs.

## **Timelines and Benchmarks for Gathering and Sharing Data**

### **YEAR ONE**

- Charge an existing campus office with evaluating the climate for ELLs at Gustavus.
- Design, administer and analyze surveys of ELLs throughout their college career, including the beginning and the end. These surveys would assess the students' needs, backgrounds, short and long-term academic goals, etc.
- Assess the ways in which Gustavus meets ELLs' needs and recommend changes.
- Record data regarding existing ELL services' use at Gustavus. Then compare this population with other students to analyze how they may differ in their retention rates, choice of major, GPA, etc.
- Gather and summarize a "snapshot" of anonymous data from entrance applications, FAFSA, LSAMP records and other materials these data in light of peer institution, state and regional population data, and develop a funding proposal.
- Identify grants for ELL and first-generation Generation 1.5 college students, and the specific data that we need to collect for these grants.

### **ONE TO THREE YEARS**

- Seek external funding in consultation with the Assistant Vice President of Corporate and Foundation Relations and other interested parties. Consider hiring an administrative specialist to gather data, assess learning outcomes, write grant proposals, and expand the ELL program by seeking faculty and staff buy-in.
- Exchange ideas with other successful programs (e.g., TRIO) by videoconferencing and campus visits.

### THREE TO FIVE YEARS

- Provide funding support (e.g., Kendall Center grants) for faculty to revise pedagogy to incorporate ELL issues into their classroom.
- Assess the cultural and academic impacts of ELL practices at Gustavus and publish results.

## II. Faculty and Staff Development

The College needs to focus on preparing faculty and staff members to help the students who utilize classrooms, dorms, libraries, administrative offices, and dining services to feel comfortable and succeed at Gustavus. Best practice is to educate the entire campus community about the dietary, religious and familial needs of ELLs. Likewise, faculty members must commit to working in productive ways with students to ensure fair and ethical classroom approaches and accurate assessment of student work. That means that faculty members need resources – speakers, workshop leaders, reading materials, or access to conferences. Faculty and staff also need opportunities to engage with ELLs via mentoring opportunities, informal gatherings, and dinners similar to the currently successful programs (e.g., Office of Diversity Development and Multicultural Programs, Center for International and Cultural Education).

### Timelines and Benchmarks for Faculty and Staff Development

#### YEAR ONE

- Enhance orientation for first-year faculty to focus on diverse learners' needs. The faculty might hear from student panels or campus community members, and discuss pedagogical strategies and assessment.
- Augment existing faculty development opportunities such as Teachers Talking, the summer "Camp Kendall" workshops and other options.

#### ONE TO THREE YEARS

- Develop and present a fall faculty retreat, centered on working with ELLs.
- Generate resources for faculty and staff to learn about ELL needs (e.g., books, articles, websites).
- Provide additional training for staff who work with financial aid, housing, and other administrative offices on campus. Emphasize advising both ELLs and their parents about these issues.
- Work with Financial Aid, Residential Life, Admission, and other offices to translate materials for students and families.
- Provide support/resources for multilingual faculty.
- Staff and develop a course specifically targeting ELL academic achievement (e.g., writing, science), dictated by students' needs.

- Exchange ideas with other successful programs (e.g., TRIO) by videoconferencing and campus visits.

### THREE TO FIVE YEARS

- Increase faculty and staff awareness of ELL issues as well as best practices. Opportunities include “Camp Kendall”, Faculty Development Day, new faculty orientation, and specialized staff orientation events (e.g., programs for Financial Aid and Residential Life).
- Create a campus environment committed to increasing and valuing diversity. Specific goals and activities might include: increasing percentage of Generation 1.5 students able to study abroad and funding Kendall Center Grant opportunities to develop materials to help faculty work with ELLs.

## III. Student Support

Here the College has to consider ELLs’ needs at several moments in their college career: 1. navigating applications and the admission process; 2. adapting to college student life; 3. experiencing and acknowledging needs in writing and oral communication; and 4. navigating classroom culture. Additionally, Generation 1.5 students often need to educate their parents regarding college paperwork and academic life.

### Timelines and Benchmarks for Student Support

#### YEAR ONE

- Form a group of staff, faculty, and current ELLs to look at existing student support programs (e.g., First Year Student Orientation, Peer Assistants, LSAMP Peer Mentors, Mentoring for Success) and identify areas of expansion and improvement.

#### ONE TO THREE YEARS

- Modify the existing First Year Student Orientation to provide not only a warm welcome to the community, but information that will help ELLs to negotiate college life and its challenges.
- Enhance and/or expand current mentoring programs that match students to professors, staff, alumni, and community members.
- Amend existing peer group programs to train peer mentors about issues and challenges pertaining to ELLs.

#### THREE TO FIVE YEARS

- Implement a Summer Bridge Program for ELLs, designed to enable the successful transition from high school to college.
- Create an endowment to allow participation of Generation 1.5 students in study abroad programs at the same rate as the whole student body.

- Add a regular staff member to assist with writing who can also train peer tutors to work effectively with ELL writers.
- Develop a conversation partners program or a tutoring position for classroom and workplace communication and formal public speaking.
- Provide one-on-one support to students who need help negotiating financial aid, registration, and other processes on campus.
- Increase training for counselors to work with diverse students who may face specific difficulties with residential life issues or the negotiation of familial needs, such as translating for family financial crises.
- Increase orientation for parents of ELLs during June registration and fall orientation.
- Include faculty in the recruitment of ELLs.

## IV. Community Outreach

The central goal of providing quality education to ELLs requires acknowledging the heightened importance of community in their lives. Through collaborative effort and shared experiences, the Gustavus community, parents, agencies, and Saint Peter businesses should work as a team. All need to come together as we address the holistic (academic, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual) needs of all students.

### Timelines and Benchmarks for Community Outreach

#### ONE TO THREE YEARS

- Contact current and prospective ELLs to encourage their families to visit campus. Strongly encourage faculty and staff representation at such events.

#### THREE TO FIVE YEARS

- Form a Parent-to-Parent Alliance where parents can advise each other on their children's' needs and issues.
- Encourage local businesses to employ ELLs.
- Locate and utilize organizations and associations that cater to student needs.

## CONCLUSION

Students, staff, and faculty at Gustavus Adolphus College need to join forces and take the initiative to serve ELLs' unique needs. We cannot ignore the students' ecosystem. For example, the college should consult with and involve parents and the broader community in the planning, organizing, and implementation of strategies and services. At the College (staff, student, or faculty levels) and

community levels, individuals need to take charge and implement the tasks that this document. The college can execute all of the above in a one to five-year time frame. All need to come together as learning communities if we are to cater to the holistic needs of all students, especially ELLs.