

FELLOWSHIPS AND UNDERGRADUATE WORKING GROUP REPORT
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Charged with “explor[ing] ways we, as a campus, can better harness the synergies between our existing efforts to attain prestigious fellowships for Gustavus students and to increase undergraduate research and creativity efforts across campus,” this working group met throughout the Fall 2013 semester to inventory present campus efforts in the areas of undergraduate research and prestigious fellowships support, to investigate the approaches of Gustavus peer and comparison group institutions in these areas, and to develop recommendations for next steps at Gustavus.¹

Inventory of Present Campus Efforts

A. *Undergraduate Research*

The 2010-2011 Undergraduate Research Working Group compiled a substantial amount of information relating to the current status of undergraduate research at Gustavus. In addition to utilizing the Commission Gustavus 150 reports, the Academic Strategic Plan, and department, program, and center strategic plans, the URWG surveyed department chairs and program directors about specific undergraduate research efforts taking place as part of the college curriculum. Their report, along the December 4, 2012 “Report on Gustavus Faculty-Student Summer/Research/Scholarship/Creativity” prepared by Tom Huber and our own conversations with colleagues, meeting with the NCUR liaison on campus, and consultation with those most closely involved with the HHMI grant and related efforts, constitute the basis for our assessment of undergraduate research at Gustavus.

We believe that nearly every department and program at Gustavus includes opportunities for students to conduct scholarly investigation and/or creative inquiry as part of academic coursework and major/minor requirements. Certainly, participating in such research is an important element of undergraduate education that increases intellectual engagement and connects students to scholarly debates more generally. Our focus, however, was on undergraduate research and creative inquiry that fulfills Academic Strategic Plan Goal A.1: “independent scholarship” in which “students and faculty work collaboratively on scholarly projects of significant rigor[,] enhanc[ing] students’ understanding, independence, and sophistication.” This research and inquiry, initiated and substantially conducted by students (under the auspices and guidance of faculty members), would generally take place outside (or beyond) a course syllabus or classroom assignment. Research and inquiry of this sort, we found, is far less common at Gustavus and receives notably little in the way of support and resources.²

¹ Darrin Good and Paula O’Loughlin, “Fellowships and Undergraduate Research Working Group Memorandum”, August 21, 2012.

² Please see Appendix 1: Thomas Huber, “Report on Gustavus Faculty-Student Summer Research/Scholarship Creativity”, December 4, 2012.

Full information can be found in the “Report on Gustavus Faculty-Student Summer Research/Scholarship Creativity” but two examples of the paucity of financial support for individual undergraduate research of the sort imagined are illustrative. First, keeping in mind that each institution reports research expenditures slightly differently, IPEDS data makes clear that Gustavus is at or near the absolute bottom of our peer and comparison institutions in numbers of college-funded summer undergraduate research positions. Second, there have been a total of 64 Presidential Faculty-Student Collaboration Grants funded since the program came into existence 16 years ago. These grants constitute the **only** college-funded (as opposed to departmental or grant-funded) summer undergraduate research opportunities at Gustavus and our total number of students funded over a decade and a half is less than or equal to what many of our peer institutions fund in a summer.

The Celebration of Creative Inquiry, now an established springtime event at Gustavus, has been an important step toward building an undergraduate research culture at Gustavus. The opportunity to publicly present and share research projects and to observe those of other students is formative and important for students. Valuable though the CCI is, however, it does not foreground the sort of student-initiated research with which our working group was most concerned. While students completing research of that sort may participate in the CCI, so do students whose research, while aptly fulfilling class requirements, does not reflect the “independent scholarship” of “significant rigor” this report addresses. This is no criticism of the CCI; it is merely an observation that it is a component of a culture of an undergraduate research culture, perhaps a necessary one, but not a sufficient one.

Some individual departments, heavily concentrated in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Division, possess departmental or divisional funds that can be used for undergraduate research (although are not necessarily used for that purpose, given other demands upon departmental budgets and resources). The clawback of restricted funds of July 2012 makes even these already occasional opportunities less likely in the future.

Although Gustavus sends a contingent of students to the NCUR conference each year, examination of the disciplines of students represented suggests that attendance is almost entirely limited to students from two departments from the Education division. Many other departments support students attending and presenting at regional undergraduate conferences and/or professional meetings. As discussed in the “Recommendations” section below, the FUGR Working Group believes that the monies currently spent on attendance at NCUR might be more valuably directed toward supporting undergraduate research and attendance at discipline-specific conferences.

In general, then, concurred with the conclusion of the 2010-2011 Undergraduate Research Working Group: “in order to develop a truly strong UR program, both students and faculty must have the support to be inspired and become interested in the work, develop ideas and specific plans, conduct the work, and disseminate their findings. The potential for increased student learning through expanding support for student research is great.”³

B. *Fellowships*

The Gustavus Fellowships Office is now in its 4th year of existence. This office facilitates the process of identifying, recruiting, and preparing academically talented students to apply for nationally prestigious fellowships such as Rhodes, Truman, Marshall, NSF, Fulbright, Udall and

³ “Undergraduate Research Working Group Final Report and Recommendations 2010-2011”, p.2.

Goldwater. While one goal of the office is for more Gustavus students to be awarded nationally competitive scholarships, the application process - preparation, application and advising - is designed to be a valuable learning experience and an opportunity for high-achieving students to clarify both their values and their goals, regardless of the ultimate outcome of the application.

Over the past 3½ years, students, faculty, staff, and administrators have recognized the Fellowships Office as a clearinghouse for information on student fellowships. Referrals to the office by faculty have increased each year as have the number of students who identify themselves as having heard about the office from outreach efforts or who were recommended it by other students. Outreach to students has slowed during the 2012-2013 academic year due to reduced resources for the office and re-establishing the office as an important source of information about post-baccalaureate funding opportunities will require renewed commitment and resources.

During the 2011-2012 academic year, the Fellowships Coordinator met individually with more than 125 students and recent alumni to discuss potential fellowship opportunities; met multiple times with approximately 100 of those students; conducted several "Fellowships 101" and Fulbright information workshops to which selected high-achieving students were invited; presented basic information about the office and its functions to several academic department clubs, fraternities and sororities, the Gustie Greeters, and departmental honor societies. In addition, the Fellowships Coordinator consulted closely with Virgil Jones to identify excellent students from underrepresented ethnic and racial minorities and held weekly Diversity Center fellowships office hours to increase awareness and knowledge of the office and its relevance to students. Because many fellowship applicants also apply for highly competitive post-baccalaureate programs such as Teach for America or the Peace Corps, significant advising time often goes to support those applications.

Working closely with Marketing and Communications, the Fellowships Coordinator has succeeded in publicizing student accomplishments prominently on the Gustavus homepage and continued to advocate for more prominent placement of academics and academic achievements on the homepage. In addition, an active Gustavus Fellowships Office Facebook page communicates fellowship opportunities and wins to current students and alumni.

Finally, scholarship and fellowship applications from and awards to Gustavus students have increased significantly over the past three years.⁴ Although we collect no data on numbers of students applying to competitive internships, NSF REUs, and similar opportunities, anecdotal data suggests that these applications and awards may also be on the rise. Students who come to the Fellowships Office as first or second-year students are advised to pursue these opportunities as a means of focusing and refining their interests and of gaining valuable knowledge and experience. As discussed below, greater coordination between efforts to support undergraduate research and those to support fellowship applications would allow Gustavus to both increase the number of such applications and to more accurately track applications and

⁴ See Appendix 2: Students Winning National Awards, 1988-2012, compiled by Bob Weisenfeld and Lisa Wojcik.

awards.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerge from our investigation of undergraduate research and fellowships advising support at peer and comparison institutions as well as from the 2010-2011 Undergraduate Research Working Group Report. Though we include suggestions for structural changes that would more prominently locate and more substantially support both the coordination of undergraduate research efforts and fellowships advising, there is no avoiding our conclusion that the **only** way to develop a strong undergraduate research program and culture at Gustavus is through the allocation of significantly more resources than have been provided previously. Doing so is a Tier 1 Commission Gustavus 150 Priority (“60 new endowed summer research and creative inquiry opportunities for Gustavus students on and off campus, in addition to those funded by grant money”) as well as a goal in the unanimously endorsed Academic Strategic Plan (competitive, ten-week student summer stipends for scholarly pursuit for at least 25 students). Several years into the implementation phase of both Commission Gustavus 150 and the Academic Strategic Plan, no significant progress toward either goal (the 60 endowed opportunities recommended by Commission Gustavus 150 or the 25 envisioned by the Academic Strategic Plan) is visible.

The following recommendations adapted and developed from the 2010-2011 Undergraduate Working Group offer a starting point for planning.⁵

Expand support for summer research, with the goal of internal support for 10-week research projects for at least 25 students per summer.

- Expand the Presidential Faculty/Student Collaboration Grants to support more students each year and to support their work more fully. We suggest an initial goal of 10 students per summer. Clarify the selection criteria and goals of the program. Increase support for research expenses in this program (recently about \$500 per project) up to \$1000 per project where the need can be justified. Include support for dissemination (publication costs and/or expenses for both the faculty and student to travel to give conference presentations) within the grant.
- Create and fund “Advanced Study Grants” to which students can apply for project-based (e.g. honors thesis or performance), topic-based (e.g. arts, environmental studies, peace studies), skills acquisition-based (language, advanced quantitative methods), location-based (e.g. Eastern Europe, Asia), or population-based (e.g. first-year students, students from underrepresented groups) support.
- Create a summer research fund for students conducting summer research not necessarily in close collaboration with a Gustavus faculty member. We suggest an initial goal of supporting 15 students per summer. Budgets should support the following, if warranted for the particular project (and if not already supported by another institution): stipend and benefits for the student, housing, supplies, travel to the research site(s), copies, dissemination expenses, etc.
- Create and maintain a vibrant academic atmosphere on campus in the summer for students. Current programming in the summer focuses on opportunities for presentations and community-building for students. This programming is quite successful, but has been heavily underwritten by grants in the science division, along with some support from the Kendall Center. Funds are needed to ensure that these activities continue.

⁵ The omission of recommendations from the Undergraduate Working Group Final Report does not signify disagreement with those recommendations.

- Elevate the academic atmosphere on campus for faculty. Many academic buildings are currently desolate in the summer, which can leave faculty less interested in spending the summer on campus working with a research student. A fund to support engaging activities for faculty during the summer (book discussion groups, Shop Talks, etc) could help make the campus a more welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment for faculty mentors.
- Increase support resources for students and faculty in the summer. During the summer, administrative support for research and student support in general (e.g., counseling services, residential life programming) are drastically reduced. This can negatively affect productivity and morale. For effective research during the summer, it is essential to ensure the library and library staff receive appropriate funding and support. Faculty in departments without summer secretarial support should have access to some administrative support. Finally, to support a community of student researchers, it would be wise to consider some summer hours for student services such as the counseling center.

Create a substantial fund to help underwrite student research that takes place during the academic year.

- Create a fund to which students can apply for funds to support research expenses during the academic year. The Sigma Xi chapter on campus has an excellent model for this. Funds should be available to all Gustavus students conducting research projects with a faculty mentor. Eligible expenses would include supplies, photocopies, travel to research sites, survey incentives, etc.
- Provide work-study positions in which students could be paid to do research with a Gustavus faculty member during the academic year thus making academic-year research opportunities more accessible to students who must work to support themselves and/or their families.
- Explore strategies to help faculty manage the supervision of student research during the academic year. In many departments on campus, student research outside the classroom requires substantial work by the faculty mentor on top of his/her normal teaching, advising, research, and service duties. Consider including the mentoring of student research into a faculty member's regular teaching load in some form.

A small portion of the resources for either of the two funds recommended above could be acquired through redirecting resources currently spent on NCUR membership and attendance.

Build an undergraduate research culture on campus. Celebrate and share student research on campus. Support the dissemination of student research beyond campus in publications, exhibits, performances, and conferences.

- Expand support for student conference travel, both in quantity and extent of support and extend this fund to include support for all kinds of dissemination of student research. Most requests of this fund are for small amounts of money, but a limited number of students attend national or international conferences for which the current \$500 maximum is inadequate. Include poster printing and other miscellaneous costs.
- Publicize and disseminate on and off-campus research opportunities for students; develop and maintain an active and up-to-date database of research opportunities; direct appropriate information about discipline-specific research opportunities to departments and majors; reach out to students through Facebook and Twitter to inform them of opportunities and research successes of Gustavus students; work with Alumni Relations and departments to develop intentional programming highlighting Gustavus alumni research successes.

- Continue to fully fund the Celebration of Creative Inquiry while developing other venues and opportunities for student presentation of more advanced research or creative inquiry. Models such as Beloit College's "Student Symposium Day", California Lutheran's "Festival of Scholarship" should be evaluated for their suitability at Gustavus.
- Recognize faculty who do excellent work engaging our students in research. Tenure and promotion guidelines should be updated to clarify that scholarship done in collaboration with students is part of a faculty member's scholarship. Create an award for faculty who have an excellent track record of engaging students in research over some time and/or for particular faculty/student collaborations that have had excellent outcomes.

Beyond funding and institutionally supporting a robust fellowships advising office, the single best means of increasing our students' competitiveness for nationally prestigious fellowships and scholarships is increasing support for, prominence of, and opportunities for undergraduate research for Gustavus students (on and off-campus).

As noted in the 2010-2011 Undergraduate Research Working Group report, coordination, development, and oversight of the implementation of these recommendations will be required. This is the area in which we see potential opportunities for overlap and synergy with fellowships advising.

Create a structure that enables effective development and oversight of undergraduate research initiatives and fellowships advising, continual strategic planning, and additional support to the campus.

- Connect the Director of Undergraduate Research and the resources pertaining to the undergraduate research program to the already-existing Gustavus Fellowships Office. (Though this might ideally be accomplished through physical proximity, a virtual connection and close communication might also suffice.) Students applying for undergraduate research opportunities are likely to be potential candidates for fellowship programs; fellowship applicants are likely to require undergraduate research opportunities in order to compile a competitive application.
- Significant expansion of our undergraduate research program will create additional administrative and advising duties; a Director of Undergraduate Research will be necessary to develop and implement the programs listed above as well as to maintain and assess them. We envision that this would be at least a half-time position, although we can easily see a full-time workload for the Director. This person should be drawn from the faculty in three-year terms in order to facilitate communication and familiarity with faculty and students as well as understanding of the classroom and intellectual culture of Gustavus.
- Expand the mission of the Gustavus Fellowships Office to include advising and assistance for students applying to highly competitive post-graduate service programs such as Teach for America and Peace Corps. There is significant overlap between students applying for nationally competitive fellowships and such programs; they often seek advice and assistance on those applications. Establishing the Fellowships Office as the locus of campus advising for such programs would likely also funnel potential fellowship applicants into the office.
- Restore the half-time status of the Fellowships Coordinator in order to enable meaningful outreach efforts to students, advising, publicity, and program development. Increase the Fellowships Coordinator contract to 10-months in order to compensate for the significant summer advising workload for fellowships such as the Fulbright, Rhodes, Marshall, and Mitchell.