

Nobel Conference Draft Strategic Plan February 2009

Section 1 – Description

1.1.1 Mission, vision, goals

Each fall since 1965, Gustavus has hosted the Nobel Conference which has a twofold mission, to bring cutting-edge science issues to the attention of an audience of students and interested adults; and to engage the panelists and the audience in a discussion of the moral and societal impact of these issues. The topic for the conference is always based in science and we endeavor to bring world-class speakers to campus for this two-day event. At least sixty Nobel laureates have served as speakers, five of whom were awarded the prize after speaking at our conference, attesting to the timeliness of the conference. True to the second part of our mission, these conferences have also asked questions like: What does it mean? What good is it? Could it be potentially harmful? In some cases, the questions of impact on society are very obvious, as at the 2007 conference whose theme was title was “Heating Up: The Energy Debate.”

As Gustavus prepared to build a new science hall in the early 1960s, College officials asked the Nobel Foundation for permission to name the building the Alfred Nobel Hall of Science as a memorial to the great Swedish inventor and philanthropist. Permission was granted, and the facility's dedication ceremony in 1963 included officials from the Nobel Foundation as well as 26 Nobel laureates. Following the 1963 Nobel Prize ceremonies in Stockholm, College representatives met with Nobel Foundation officials, asking them to endorse an annual science conference at the College and to allow use of the Nobel name to establish credibility and high standards. Responding to enthusiastic support from several prominent Nobel laureates, the board granted the wish, and in 1965 the College began an annual event convening the world's top research scientists and scholars for an intellectual feast to be spread before students and professors of the Upper Midwest.

The Nobel Conference is a collaborative effort involving many areas of campus, primarily the faculty, the Provost's office, the President's office, and Marketing and Communication. The Director of the Conference, a member of the Gustavus Faculty, has the responsibility of selecting the topic for each year (with the help of an advisory group) and organizing a committee of faculty, staff, and students to focus the theme of the conference and determine the best speakers. Once these speakers are identified, the faculty chair and the Director write the letters of invitation. The committee also helps to determine the order of the speakers and suggest and organize additional events, such as Tuesday evening speakers, displays, and lunch-time activities. Members of the committee also often act as faculty hosts for a speaker during their visit, with the help of one or two student hosts.

Each of our Nobel speakers is asked to present a solid scientific lecture of approximately 50 minute length to a well-educated audience of 4,000 - 5,000 persons that includes faculty and students from national colleges and universities and high school seniors (science classes) from a seven-state

region in the Midwest, as well as interested adults. Our large lecture hall is technically equipped to clearly present visual material to the audience in Lund Center, as well as on-campus overflow areas and off-campus sites. After each of the lectures, the speakers participate in a 20-minute dialogue involving all of the invited participants and the audience. The conference has traditionally been surrounded by a great deal of ceremony. We always open with a processional of the faculty and often the conferral of an honorary degree to one of the speakers. Musical preludes precede each of the daytime lectures, the Hillstrom Art Museum will feature a show designed to compliment the conference, and the finale for Tuesday evening usually involves an orchestra concert. Occasionally, the Department of Theater and Dance will get involved with a dance interlude or a play.

Faculty and staff from across campus participate in the Nobel Conference, in some cases in Lund Center and sometimes in their offices or one of the overflow areas. Participation is greatest among the faculty in the sciences, but many non-science faculty also get involved. Some faculty view Nobel Conference as a time to catch up on grading, or an early break from the classroom. Others see it as a great opportunity for personal growth and life-long learning and participate fully. Since there is little, if any, expectation from the College, it has become an individual choice as to how much to get involved. A small number of faculty see the Nobel Conference as an intrusion into their teaching schedule, but most are proud of it.

A relatively small number of students are directly involved, as student hosts, musicians, ushers, or in other ways. Some unknown fraction of the student body participates by attending the lectures in Lund Center or watching on their own computer or in an overflow area. Some faculty require students in their classes to participate in some minimal way. For example, they may require the students to write a brief report on one or two lectures. But, most faculty keep the requirements minimal because there is no guarantee that students can attend a substantial part of the conference since we do not as a College cancel classes. It seems that student participation in Nobel Conference is highly dependent upon motivation by faculty, which is not even across campus. It also seems that once a student has attended one or two Nobel lectures, she or he is likely to attend in the future.

Vision – Where we want to be....

We believe that the Nobel Conference is an excellent program that should be a signature event of the College. To that end it, we would like to see it known throughout the world. However, we are very close to the maximum on-campus audience we can accommodate. So, we will need to explore other ways for everyone to participate in the Conference. We think that the conference can make this step to the next level, where research scientists can come to communicate effectively with a large public audience, by paying careful attention to the use of technology and continuing to provide a consistently excellent program.

In 20 years, we fully expect that the participation in the conference will have grown to include a world-wide audience of persons of all ages. It will be an integral part of life-long learning programs such as Elderhostel and those of the Osher Life-Long Learning Institutes, as well as

high school and college programs across the country and around the world. We plan to make the Conference available at venues like science museums for adults and students who cannot travel to Saint Peter. There will also be a substantial audience who watches the lectures when they can, perhaps live on the internet or downloaded at another time.

We plan to continue to focus the themes of the Nobel Conference on the sciences and economics, but through the lens of Science, Technology, and Society. With the help of good faculty chairs and committees, we expect to keep the topics current and relevant without chasing fads. Topics of interest to a broader audience, better communication with faculty, and availability of supplemental resources should provide for better integration of the Conference into more Gustavus courses and programs. Combining this with post-Conference events will increase the overall involvement of the College community, as would the addition of a lecture by a Nobel Literature Prize winner.

We know that we have reached the next level with the Nobel Conference when we have attained the following goals:

- International recognition of the Nobel Conference
- Increase national and international audience while maintaining or slightly increasing size of on-campus audience
- Maintain or improve quality of Lund Center experience while improving quality of experience in all overflow areas on campus
- Maintain or improve quality of topics and speakers
- Expand ancillary events associated with the Conference to include more experiential activities
- Expand use of technology to maintain or increase interest of younger participants
- Expand offerings of supplemental resources to include curricular material for a range of age groups
- Expand associated life-long learning programs to reach a national audience
- Increase on-campus interest in the Nobel Conference with previews and follow-up activities

1.2 Programs

After more than three decades, the original promise of the Nobel Conference continues to be realized. It is essentially the promise of Alfred Nobel's testament first ventured by the dying chemist-entrepreneur and is characterized by an endeavor to launch international cooperation within the sciences and other cultural activities, and by cooperation based on reason in the service of humanity. This is the spirit in which the Nobel Conference carries on its work. The festivities and the glamour of the annual event should not draw away from the core scientific values on which the conference was founded.

The focus of the two-day conference continues to be the six or seven lectures by preeminent scientists, philosophers, and theologians. These speakers and the theme of the conference are chosen by a faculty committee whose goal is to create the environment out of which a great conference can grow. So, the speakers must be among the best in their area, but they also need to be excellent communicators so that they can reach an audience which is very diverse in regard to age, maturity, and education.

The conference would be incomplete without the cultural activities, such as the musical introductions, the processional, the honorary degrees, the Nobel Concert, and the Nobel Art Show. These festivities help set the atmosphere as that of a giant intellectual party. The recent addition of Tuesday evening talks by local experts has been successful at helping ground the discussions of the main speakers in the local reality.

We will explore the feasibility of including a winner of a Nobel Prize in Literature in the Conference in some manner. With care, we should be able to integrate this lecture in such a way that it doesn't appear to be an add-on, and becomes a natural part of the program.

1.3 Support relationships

The Nobel Conference would not happen each year without the support of the entire Gustavus community. From the electricians and carpenters directing traffic to the students on the sidewalk who provide directions to our many guests, this is a community effort. However, there are some organizations that play a major role in supporting the conference. The staff of the Marketing and Communication office lead the charge, handling the majority of the publicity, logistic, and management issues. For many years, Media Services, part of Gustavus Technology Services, was responsible for the audio visual arrangements with substantial help from Physical Plant. Even in recent years, when much of the audio visual set up has been handled by an outside contractor, it has been Media Services that coordinates the efforts. As we move to add live streaming of the events, we will rely more heavily on staff members in other areas of GTS.

The Music department continues to contribute to the Nobel Conference in two major ways, prelude music and the Nobel concert. The directors of many of the ensembles select music that fits the theme for their group perform before one of the lectures. In recent years, the Nobel

concert has been organized by the orchestra director, who has put together a program that highlights the orchestra, but also involves other groups, such as dancers. Each year, the director of the Hillstrom museum plans a show to coincide with the Nobel Conference which is linked to the theme of the Conference, often with opening night during the Conference. Occasionally, the Theater and Dance department arranges a play to open during the Conference, in one recent case, even commissioning a new play.

The advertising and marketing of the Nobel Conference is a joint venture between the Marketing and Communications office and a contractor who has been involved for many years. The contractor has traditionally provided content through the use of science writers who interview speakers, graphic design for the poster, tickets, etc., and arranged for regional advertising in newspapers and magazines. The Marketing and Communication office has coordinated the advertising and handled national efforts. They have also made arrangements with local, regional, and national media outlets for stories about the conference and individual speakers, as well as coordinating interviews with speakers. Both the contractor and the office of Marketing and Communication use Gustavus Printing Services and Post Office/ Mailroom to prepare and deliver mailings.

The Admissions office has often used the Nobel Conference as a direct recruiting tool by inviting particular groups of students, such as National Merit Scholarship winners, to campus for the event. In a similar manner, the Advancement office has invited donors and potential donors to join us for the conference and, in many cases, the speakers for lunch. Of particular note is the relatively recent addition of the preview dinner at the Science Museum of Minnesota. This has been viewed as an opportunity to reach important members of the Twin Cities community who may not be able to (or choose not to) attend the Conference.

The Bookmark has a good selection of books authored by Nobel speakers and related materials for sale during the Conference.

The director of Dining Services has a major role in organizing meals for speakers, visitors, and honored guests on top of their usual job of feeding the faculty staff and students. This includes preparing and serving a substantial number of box lunches (or the equivalent) for audience members and, in most years, a formal banquet. Dining Services also operates concessions during the Conference, selling snacks and drinks in the area just outside of Lund Center, as well as providing free coffee, lemonade, and cookies for the audience during afternoon breaks.

Section 2 Strategic Review

2.1 Strategic Issues

Strengths:

The community feels that one of the strengths of the Nobel Conference is its connection with the academic program at Gustavus. Some of this perception stems from the structure, with Nobel administered through the Provost's Office, having a director who is a member of the faculty, and committees of faculty, staff, and students with a faculty chair. In addition, the staff of the Marketing and Communication office are very good at handling the logistics and hospitality. The result of the collaboration of the faculty and administration has been an excellent ongoing program that all at Gustavus can be and are proud of.

The choice of topics for the Conference has been viewed as appropriate, timely, and appropriately diverse, although there is some question as to how they are determined. The faculty committee structure seems to work well, being open to all members of the community, generally inviting to newcomers, and democratic in process.

The community sees the following items as strengths that should not be changed if possible:

- The hospitality we show to speakers and visitors
- The inclusion of at least one Nobel Laureate
- The focus on science
- The informal interactions that speakers have with student and faculty hosts
- The inclusion of music and arts in the program, particularly the preludes
- The accessibility of speakers
- The Q/A sessions and other opportunities for speaker response
- Affordability
- Noontime (and other time) experiential components
- The festive nature and ceremony surrounding the Conference
- The timing (early October)
- The local focus on Tuesday evenings
- The goal of having the lectures geared to a general audience
- The accessibility to all individuals and schools that wish to attend

Weaknesses (internal):

One major weakness of the Nobel Conference is the meaning it has to many members of the Gustavus community. Some students and faculty see the Conference as targeted to an external audience and don't realize the opportunity it provides them. The perception that the Tuesday and Wednesday of Nobel are vacation days or a time to catch up on grading or other work is a major concern.

A second area of concern is the heavy reliance on a gift-in-kind from an outside contractor to provide the audio and visual engineering for the Conference. If or when the contractor is no longer able to provide this service, the College will need to hire another firm at a substantial cost. Our audience has come to expect a very well run program with good audio and visuals, so we will need to continue to balance the resources that we spend on content and delivery. A related weakness is the Conferences reliance on Media Service, which is essentially a one-person show and stretched to its very limits. Keeping the technical aspects of the Conference current will rely heavily on that one individual and perhaps a few others from GTS, as we expand our external audience, particularly in the realm of technical support for those off campus who are watching the lectures on the Internet.

Although we advertise the Nobel Conference in a number of different venues, there is no consistent, well thought out, advertising campaign. This may be partly due to the fact that we really don't know who we want the audience to be. But, it is clear that we will need to be much more intentional about advertising and use of media, if we are to take Nobel to the next level. Our one-time partnership with Minnesota Public Television was apparently successful, and it seems that we should be able to do something similar each year, as long as we can work out all of the intellectual property issues.

The planning process for the Nobel Conference is not universally perceived as transparent and even the Marketing and Communications staff feel "out of the loop."

Much of the planning and execution of the Nobel Conference relies heavily on a single individual which may not be sustainable for the long run.

There are some questions about the choice of speakers, including concerns about gender balance and political views. There may be a misperception about the expectation of the inclusion of a "theologian" in every conference.

Opportunities:

Recent advances in technology have provided the College with the opportunities to take the Nobel Conference to the next level with only minor changes in the program. It is becoming easier to advertise more widely, to involve remote audiences, and to disseminate the discussions held on campus. It will also be possible to involve speakers who are not physically present in the conference, opening up the possibility of other kinds of world-wide collaborations, like a parallel conference with an institution in another country.

As the audio and visual technology becomes more ubiquitous, it should be easier find contractors, although the price may not decrease. It should also be easier to connect with other educational institutions, especially high schools, many of which are seeing technology upgrades.

We will be able to use technology to provide pre- and post- Conference connections with Gustavus faculty and our speakers to extend the discussions and provide easier integration. This should include connecting with prospective students and alumni, and even putting them in contact with each other before and after the conference.

We should take advantage of the technology, especially the ubiquitous mobile devices, to excite the younger audience, in much the same way as the Obama campaign did.

The recent change of director provides an opportunity to make changes in how planning is accomplished, among other things. For example, viewing topics or themes for the Conference through a science, technology, and society lens may provide a way to keep the topics timely. We should take advantage of the many Nobel Conference speakers as advisors in selecting themes.

We should expand the activities that we provide for our on-campus audience by taking advantage of connections with the Science Museum of Minnesota and other local groups to provide more individual learning opportunities. These may include simple displays, interactive kiosks, demonstrations shows, and experiential learning activities.

Challenges (external):

One of our major challenges will be keeping our topics interesting and current while planning several years in advance. It will also be challenging to keep our focus in the sciences and economics while approaching more contemporary issues.

Ensuring that our speakers are able to “reach” the breadth of our audience with their lectures will continue to be important, especially as the background of the general public continues to slip. Even getting some portion of the audience interested will be a challenge. It will be helpful if we are able to articulate who the audience is for the Nobel Conference.

As we expand our off-campus audience, the challenge will be to give them as much of the Nobel Conference experience as possible.

Fundraising for the Nobel Conference will continue to be a challenge.

Getting our speakers interested enough in the Conference to make time in their busy schedules to stay for the entire event. It might help if we can somehow convince them this is a sort of public think tank. It certainly is an opportunity to have discussions with other scientists with whom they may not normally interact. It may also be a good place and way to interact with the general public.

Keeping the interest of high school faculty as they deal with mandates like “no child left behind” will be a continuing challenge, as well as maintaining connections to the curriculum. We would

like to meet this challenge and even expand interest from education institutions across the country and around the world.

2.2 Barriers

As discussed previously, the Nobel Conference is connected with and relies on many areas of campus. So, change will necessarily be incremental and not always easy as we attempt to coordinate with many groups.

Of course, funding Nobel Conference will continue to be an issue, even as we begin to take advantage of new endowments. Many of our visions will require an increased level of funding.

A minor barrier to overcome is the perception of the Nobel Conference by the Gustavus community. There are some who see it as only valuable for faculty and students in the sciences (and economics) who will question whether it is worth it.

Section 3 Strategic Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations

Goal 1:

Sufficient funding to support the program at the highest level, including appropriate honoraria for speakers, support for marketing, support of director and faculty chairs, and funding for high level audio visual presentation and transmission. This will likely come from a combination of sources, such as endowment, annual gifts, and College budget.

Strategic Initiative 1.1

Maintain or increase the endowment for the Nobel Conference

Strategic Initiative 1.2

Maintain or increase fundraising for the Nobel Conference

Goal 2:

Support for technology at the highest level. In order to maintain the quality of the on-campus experience, and expand the off-campus coverage, we will be relying heavily on technology.

Strategic Initiative 2.1

The College needs to commit to staffing the Media Services area at a level appropriate to the work load. Even if an outside contactor is involved in the audio and video setup, there will be a significant load associated with the coordination of these efforts.

Strategic Initiative 2.2

We will need to commit GTS staff to interface with off-campus groups (and perhaps individuals) to set up the best possible connections for streaming the conference. Some staff time might need to be essentially technical support to help with quality control issues related to web streaming.

Strategic Initiative 2.3

Maintain or increase the level of support for web site development to ensure promotional materials and pedagogical resources are delivered in an efficient and timely manner.

Goal 3:

Increase the on-campus interest and support for the Nobel Conference.

Strategic Initiative 3.1

Expand the faculty involvement in the planning process to increase buy-in. Increase breadth of faculty involvement Nobel related events, like preview dinner.

Strategic Initiative 3.2

Implement significant pre-and post- Conference activities to better tie the Conference to the curriculum.

Strategic Initiative 3.3

Educate more faculty (science and non-science) about the trans-disciplinary nature of science by providing funding for a small team of faculty to attend the annual meeting of the AAAS every year. This will also help identify topics for future conference.

Strategic Initiative 3.4

Integrate better with Rydell/Nobel Lectureship program.

Strategic Initiative 3.5

Start a Nobel Conference blog to keep primarily the local community informed about the process and progress.

Strategic Initiative 3.6

Survey the College community after each Conference to determine what worked and what didn't.

Strategic Initiative 3.7

Begin a tradition of adding a Nobel Literature prize winner to list of speakers.

Strategic Initiative 3.8

Remind faculty that Nobel Conference is an important part of the College's academic mission.

Goal 4:

Continue to offer current and relevant topics representing cutting-edge science and presented excellent speakers.

Strategic Initiative 4.1

Create an advisory committee consisting of former speakers and Nobel Laureate friends.

Strategic Initiative 4.2

Promote the Nobel Conference as a think tank where highly specialized scientists can interact with scientists in other specialties, as well as with the public.

Goal 5:

Increase the recognition of the Nobel Conference, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Strategic Initiative 5.1

Develop a national or international marketing plan for the Nobel Conference with the help of one or more outside consultants.

Strategic Initiative 5.2

Maintain or increase the quality of the Nobel Conference web site so that it provides a maximum amount of information in a very navigable format.

Strategic Initiative 5.3

Maintain connection with Science Museum of Minnesota and connections to similar regional organizations.

Strategic Initiative 5.4

Harvest comments from speakers to use when inviting new speakers.

Goal 6:

Increase national and international audience while maintaining or slightly increasing size of on-campus audience

Strategic Initiative 6.1

Refine the technology needed to provide an excellent video and audio stream on the Internet.

Strategic Initiative 6.2

Offer the Conference to high schools across the country, along with suggestion on how to integrate it into their classrooms.

Strategic Initiative 6.3

Offer the Conference to museums and other organizations across the country, along with marketing material.

Strategic Initiative 6.4

Develop partnerships with the Osher Life-Long Learning Institutes to offer programs based on the Nobel Conference.

Goal 7:

Maintain or improve quality of Lund Center experience while improving quality of experience in all overflow areas on campus

Strategic Initiative 7.1

Continue to use the best contractor(s) possible to provide the audio visual experience for Lund Center.

Strategic Initiative 7.2

Improve the quality of the overflow venue by intentionally addressing the audio visual and seating problems. Ensure that the same high level of quality is available at all overflow venues.

Goal 8:

Expand ancillary events associated with the Conference to include more experiential activities

Strategic Initiative 8.1

Expand the opportunities for Nobel visitors to learn more about the subject in individual ways by adding more displays and interactive kiosks.

Strategic Initiative 8.2

Maintain or increase the number and quality of Tuesday evening experiences, like the forums on local topics.

Strategic Initiative 8.3

Increase the number of demonstration shows and experiential learning events (like spear throwing).

Goal 9:

Increase participation by younger audience members

Strategic Initiative 9.1

Use new technologies such as mobile devices for interacting with the audience in addition to traditional methods.

Strategic Initiative 9.2

Contact Obama campaign for additional suggestions.

Goal 10:

Expand offerings of supplemental resources to include curricular material for a range of age groups and expand associated life-long learning programs to reach a national audience

Strategic Initiative 10.1

Develop workshops for high school teachers (and students?), clergy, and others to introduce and explore the Nobel topic.

Strategic Initiative 10.2

Develop partnerships with the Osher Life-Long Learning Institutes to offer programs based on the Nobel Conference.

Goal 11:

Maintain festive and ceremonial aspect of the Nobel Conference.

Strategic Initiative 11.1

Ensure that there are musical preludes prior to each lecture

Strategic Initiative 11.2

Ensure that there is a significant musical or theatrical event for the audience to get involved in (probably Tuesday evening).

Goal 12:

Increase the sustainability of the Nobel Conference by reducing the heavy reliance on a single individual.

Strategic Initiative 12.1

Develop a plan to share the responsibility of the director of Nobel Conference so that it is not so dependent on a single person.

Strategic Initiative 12.2

Also, provide for transitioning between directors.

Section 4 Assessment

Goal 1:

I believe that we will be able to determine if we have maintained sufficient funding for the Nobel Conference if we are able to maintain the highest quality program. For example, if speaker honoraria are insufficient, we will “loose” more potential speakers than we might expect.

Goal 2:

Post-conference surveys and other audience feedback will be used to determine if we are successful in maintaining a high quality production.

Goal 3:

By tracking the number of off-campus participants in the Nobel Conference, we will be able to directly assess our progress toward this goal.

Goal 4:

Post-conference surveys and other audience feedback will be used to determine if we are successful in continuing to offer current and relevant topics representing cutting-edge science and presented excellent speakers.

Goal 5:

In order to demonstrate that we have achieved goal 5, we will track the number of inquiries that we receive about the Nobel Conference from people in our region, nation, and from other countries.

Goal 6:

We will track the number and locations of our off-campus audience in order to determine if we have achieved this goal.

Goal 7:

Post-conference surveys and other audience feedback will be used to determine if we have been able to maintain or improve the quality of the Lund Center experience while improving quality of experience in all overflow areas on campus.

Goal 8:

We will assess our success in expanding ancillary events and experiential activities by tracking the numbers and perceived quality through surveys.

Goal 9:

We will make use of post-conference surveys to assess our success in increasing participation by younger audience members.

Goal 10:

In order to demonstrate that we have been able to expand the quantity and quality of the curricular material by surveying the high school and life-long learning participants, and others we may target in the future.

Goal 11:

Post-conference surveys and other audience feedback will be used to determine if we have been able to maintain the festive and ceremonial aspect of the Nobel Conference.

Goal 12:

We will assess the sustainability of the Nobel Conference by monitoring faculty interest in the director position.

This Plan was submitted by the Director of the Nobel Conference at Gustavus on May 28, 2009:



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Director of the Nobel Conference at Gustavus