Community Engagement Task Force
Final Recommendations
May 17, 2009

Each member of the Community Engagement Task Force came to the table with a definition for community engagement shaped by their wonderfully diverse personal experience. To help expand our thinking, we gathered a variety of inputs, including some formal definitions of Community Engagement, Service-Learning, and Student Engagement from Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse Web site (www.servicelearning.org):

> **Community Engagement** is a central value affirmed by the service-learning movement. Colleges, universities, and community colleges cooperate with nonprofit agencies, government agencies, faith-based organizations, and individuals to improve the community in which the institution resides. Service-learning, faculty participation, and student volunteers represent community engagement. This ethic of service affirms the responsibility of educational institutions to bring their resources to impact gaps in community services.
> **Service-learning** is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service-learning combines service objectives and learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content.
> **Student Engagement** occurs when student learning is active (vs. passive) and focuses on learning (vs. instruction) and on the application (vs. the acquisition) of knowledge.

Another way to help define Community Engagement is to look at the emphasis of Service and Learning through the following illustrations:

> **S**l – Big "S", small "l" means the emphasis is on community service aspect with a lot of projects.
> sL – Small "s", big "L" puts the focus on experiential learning through programs like internships.
> SL – Big "S" and "L" integrates the campus, classroom and community and is intentional about both Service and Learning.

"SL" is the definition of Community Engagement that we used.

We believe that excellence in developing and sustaining a strong Community Engagement focus is at the very core of the mission of Gustavus: "…to develop in them a capacity and passion for lifelong learning, and to prepare them for fulfilling lives of leadership and service in society." Ultimately, Gustavus is looking to create graduates who are engaged citizens of the world who are

- Committed to lifelong learning;
- Practiced in intellectual diversity and civil discourse;
- Connected to their communities.

Strategic Initiative 2.2: *Enhance student engagement through the development of residential learning communities to integrate student learning beyond the classroom.*

Theme-based Housing
Implement a structure to support a minimum of 25 percent of student housing to be theme-based, including communities that link building assignment and academic courses with a faculty advisor.

Over the next five years this would involve**:** Designing a new master plan for Gustavus residence halls that includes the enhancing and expansion of theme-based communities; reviewing current residence hall theme-based communities to determine how to maximize specific learning objectives attached to the programs; and strengthening the role of community advisor to be more active and engaged with the community achieving the student learning outcomes.

Strategic Initiative 2.4: *Develop and sustain a community committed to and practiced in intellectual diversity and civil discourse.*

Support Structure
Create a support structure to coordinate campus-wide initiatives relating to intellectual diversity and civil discourse.

This may involve a partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Divisions, programming funds, some level of staff support, and an advisory board. Funding should support both large and small group opportunities.

Difficult Discussions Program
Create a "Difficult Discussions" program that provides opportunities for students to discuss relevant life issues.

This could involve both formal discussion groups and a structure to support informal/ad hoc discussions, as well as facilities on campus conducive to extended casual conversation and discussions.

Student Training
Teach students a process of effective communication and conflict resolution in a civil manner during their First-Term Seminar (FTS).

Learning the process is more important than debating a specific topic. By leveraging the FTS, the students learn tools they can use to handle the many new challenges they face in their college career, ranging from roommate issues to political conversations to academic or social disagreements. When fully implemented, all students will have a common "language" to use on campus and plenty of experience with the tools and the process to take into the world.

Faculty Development

Create and annually present a faculty development workshop to prepare faculty to include understanding of and participation in public discourse in their classes.

The development workshops could also provide the preparation necessary to deliver the communication and conflict resolution training in the First-Term Seminar or opportunities to reach a wide variety of students.

Speaker Series
Develop a speaker series to support intellectual diversity and civil discourse.

This may be accomplished by providing a variety of public speakers representing different viewpoints or having nationally known opponents and proponents on major public policy issues attend a moderated discussion on campus. This speaker series could include the St. Peter community.

Reading in Common
Expand the "Reading in Common" program beyond first year students to involve upper-class students, alumni, parents, and friends by providing a medium for book discussions. This could include online opportunities for discussion.

*Strategic Initiative 2.6: Engage with **local and regional partners** for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, the strengthening of our community, and students' civic and academic learning.*

Point of Distinction
Make community engagement a point of distinction for Gustavus and receive the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification.
Ultimately, community engagement should be a critical differentiator of the Gustavus brand, what the College is really known for. Gustavus has an opportunity to create a premier model of community engagement in a rural context. One step to mark this point of distinction would be to gain the Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation. By focusing on the Carnegie recognition, Gustavus will dedicate the resources, energy and priority to the recommendations and programs that build community engagement and drive the recognition.

Position Gustavus as a "thought leader" for community-engaged learning for the state, region, and nation.

This can be done by creating and implementing a plan to actively engage numerous members in the Gustavus community in the regional/national dialogue on community-engaged learning. Many of the other recommendations are required to make this one a reality. A sign of success would be having Gustavus staff and faculty asked to consult for other institutions and

communities and Gustavus students conducting and presenting research at undergraduate research conferences.

Develop a "signature" program in the area of community-engaged learning.

As community engagement emerges as a point of distinction for the College, there should also emerge a signature model/program/event to embody this point for the campus and to showcase to the broader community, alumni, parents, and prospective students. This could be an annual conference to educate attendees about best practices in implementing community-engaged learning or could be a component of community-based learning (e.g. learning partnerships) that is so integrated in the institution that Gustavus is seen as a national model.

Community Relationships

Create a new model (Partnership Council) to support and a modified philosophy to deepen mutually beneficial relationships between the Community Service Center and community partners.

One area this group may explore is how to maximize January Interim Experience to involve students in community-based learning.

Create systems to improve communication among Gustavus and potential community partners to maximize student learning outcomes.

Sharing opportunities and information with non-profits, schools, business, etc. to ensure that everyone benefits and that students learn the process of Act-Reflect-Connect which prepares them for lifelong learning.

Fund a program so that faculty, staff, and students can apply for mini-grants to build collaboration with Gustavus and an outside entity.

Collaborations are a key to the College's future. The College should create a culture of fostering and nurturing collaborations. This would require campus leaders to be more accessible to students, faculty and community members.

Student Participation in Service

Expand opportunities and support to faculty so within five years, 75 percent of graduating seniors will have participated in a course or program involving community-based learning.

Increase the number of courses with community-based learning components by 30 percent over five years.

Provide students access to engage in transformational experiences in the community by removing participation barriers of transportation and funding. In addition, provide the staff and financial resources needed to sustain multiple entry points for meaningful engagement.

The goal is to keep participation voluntary, to involve self-reflection, and increase the demand for community-based learning activities.

Faculty Development for Community-Based Learning
Create a faculty development program focused on incorporating service/service learning/engaged learning in course curriculum that is presented annually.

Building on the rich history and growing enthusiasm on campus, provide faculty the support and training needed to strengthen and expand current offerings. This would require an assistant director to focus on this development.

Create institutional grants for faculty to develop or enhance community-based components to a course.

Develop a faculty/community liaison to support curriculum design in conjunction with community needs and resources.

Establish a faculty award recognizing faculty and staff who are exemplary in their commitment to service learning or community-based learning.
This award, coordinated by the Community Service Center, would include a monetary gift to be given to the student organization of the recipient's choice.

Community Service Center Assessment
Create and implement a multi-faceted assessment plan for the Community Service Center that focuses on the understanding, involvement, and impact of community service and service-learning among faculty, students, and community partners.

Community Service Center Expansion
Expand the capacity of the Community Service Center, both in physical space and staff, to meet the needs of faculty, students, and community partners.

The Community Service Center is at the heart of community engagement on the Gustavus campus. The biggest barrier to growth is capacity – physical space, as well as professional staff – to accommodate present and future Community Service Center needs.

Fine Arts Facility
Build a world-class, multi-use fine arts facility with seating capacity up to 1500.

This facility would accommodate Gustavus performing ensembles and theatrical productions, as well as those of the surrounding community, and would draw audiences from the larger region (northern Iowa/southern Minnesota).   This facility would address the pressing need for rehearsal space and a technology-equipped performance venue, and would also provide opportunities to develop closer partnerships with regional arts groups.

Alumni Center
Build an alumni center that could serve as a community gathering location integrated with student life, yet sensitive to the needs of the alumni and broader community.

Ideally, the center would utilize a campus location with significance to a wide array of alumni. The center would be a gathering place – as well as an "outreach and engagement center" – a place that would show students that alumni involvement is more than fundraising. It could be linked with the Community Service Center and/or a facility based in the Twin Cities.

Academic Department Volunteer Councils
Create volunteer leadership councils of alumni, parents and friends for interested academic major or interdisciplinary program.

Support academic excellence by broadening the experiences for students and faculty outside of the classroom by involving volunteers in meaningful and mutually beneficial engagement. The council could provide faculty/staff with information on emerging industry or professional trends; assist students with internships or career exploration; provide guest lectures; mentor individual students; engage in online discussions; and assist in the admission effort. Volunteers can provide a link from the classroom to the professional world; help students to see the practical application for disciplinary knowledge; and help them understand the social, political, ethical context in which knowledge is connected to action.