

Exploring Our Gifts

One-College Initiative Statement

In a sense, *Exploring Our Gifts* was created as one way to further Augsburg's mission and to embed it more deeply into both the identity and the activities of the College. Based on Martin Luther's concept of vocation—the idea that God calls each individual to live a life of service and love—the various projects of *Exploring Our Gifts* allow faculty, staff, and students to search for purpose and meaning by exploring the connection between God, the self, and the community.

Because of its emphasis on vocation, *Exploring Our Gifts* affirms the centrality of faith in our lives. This focus underlies all the projects, but in many of the projects the connection is particularly overt. For example, the Lilly Scholars project reaches out to students who are considering ministry or church leadership and helps them explore their options and discern their calling. There is also a strong faith component in the Church Leader Development project, which encourages students to develop leadership skills by serving youth as camp counselors. For faculty and staff members, the Lilly Lunch series provides role models by inviting members of the Augsburg community to give presentations about their vocation journeys.

Exploring Our Gifts is firmly grounded in the liberal arts. The central goal of the program is to encourage all members of the Augsburg community to reflect on what it means to be human and how they can use their knowledge, skills, and talents in service to others—a lifelong process that involves both intellectual inquiry and spiritual discernment. The program promotes interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration so that differing perspectives can enrich this discourse. For example, the program co-sponsors the Critical Conversations series of discussions, which brings together faculty members from a variety of disciplines to discuss the concept of vocation and how to incorporate it into their classes. Another example is the Professional Development project, which offers vocation retreats and seminars to diverse groups of faculty and staff members. The Vocatio Mentoring project is also a good example of interdisciplinary sharing since it creates teams that include students, faculty members, and alumni from various fields.

Exploring Our Gifts is intentionally inclusive in its philosophy, program design, and activities. This is in keeping with Luther's contention that all people are children of God who can make valuable contributions to the world. Program activities are open to all members of the community, and a number of the projects deliberately invite diversity. For example, the International Exploration project exposes students to people in other countries who are committed to the common good and who live in service to others. Another example is the Vocatio Worship series, which brings people from a wide variety of occupations and perspectives to campus to speak at chapel. In order to further strengthen the program's inclusive orientation, the Lilly Advisory Board recently decided to create a new project focusing on interreligious dialogue, and the *Exploring Our Gifts* journal (*Till & Keep*) has instituted an open submission policy.

Because of Augsburg's location in the central city, *Exploring Our Gifts* puts special emphasis on the opportunities and challenges of the urban setting. The Urban Immersion project exposes students to church workers and community organizers who devote their lives to serving the urban community. The Lilly Interns project enables students to donate their labor to a number of non-profit or faith-based organizations near Augsburg. High School students who attend the Summer Theological Institute take advantage of the educational and cultural resources of the city, as do the Vocatio Mentoring teams.

Since the work of the *Exploring Our Gifts* program is so closely aligned with the mission of the College, we want to ensure that its important work and the benefits it provides to the Augsburg community will continue beyond the life of the grant. To this end, we are working to develop the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning, a lasting presence on campus that will build upon the spirit, momentum, and accomplishments of *Exploring Our Gifts*.