



Identifying and Supporting Gaelic Learning Communities:

An initial report based on a survey of Scottish Gaelic
teachers and study groups in North America

Survey conducted February-March 2017

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I. Introduction

In 2016, the ACGA Board of Directors, concerned that ACGA membership had declined in recent years, decided to focus the organization and its resources on building membership in North America and connecting its members to one another and the organization.

As a first step, a Membership & Outreach Committee was formed and conducted an initial survey of ACGA members. One of the key findings of that survey was a sense of disconnection among many members not just from ACGA but from any sort of Gaelic-language community.

When asked what offerings or services they would like to receive from ACGA, many of the 66 members who responded said immersion weekends or days, online classes, instructional materials and links to classes/teachers/events in their communities or regions.

This survey of Gaelic Learning Communities in North America is an initial attempt to map the Scottish Gaelic learning landscape with an eye to eventually helping ACGA members identify and join local classes, attend events and meet other members and Gaelic learners.

II. Purpose of Survey and Report

Currently, the “map” of Scottish Gaelic North America is very vague. Outside Nova Scotia, where a living Gaelic language community still exists, the map is clearest in the US Mid-Atlantic and Pacific Northwest, core territories of ACGA and Seattle-based Slighe nan Gàidheal.

We need to fill in that map with greater detail from coast-to-coast and north-to-south.

Since its foundation in 1984, ACGA has published lists of study groups, classes and teachers in its quarterly newsletter, *An Naidheachd Againne*, and on its website. Rather than just listing study groups, we now wish to identify and eventually link Gaelic Learnings Communities.

This represents an evolution in our perspective on language learning, both teaching and acquisition, with an emphasis on not just on individual study but community organizing, with the goal of building and connecting communities of Scottish Gaelic learners in North America.

This, we believe, should be a primary part of ACGA’s mission.

However, we have to identify communities, determine their current status and ask what assistance they might need from ACGA and/or other organizations to grow and flourish before proceeding. This survey is a first, not a final, step toward a clearer view of those communities.

III. Definition: Gaelic Learning Communities

To date, “Gaelic Learning Community” has principally been used to refer to Gaelic learners as a whole, i.e. “the Gaelic-learning community of Scotland,” the overall number of people learning Gaelic in Scotland or elsewhere. We’re adding a new definition: A community of Gaelic learners living in a particular place or region, such as New York, Toronto, Seattle or Dallas.

A Gaelic-learning community is not a class, though it may include a study group and formal classes. It may be focused on other activities involving the language, from social evenings to group outings. It may consist of people living close by who take an online course and meet only occasionally. The community is a network of people who want to learn Scottish Gaelic.

John Donne rightly said, “No man is an island,” and few Gaelic learners can exist on an “island” of their own for long — interaction with other learners and speakers is obviously important to language acquisition as well as maintenance. Many ACGA members express a strong desire to join a “community” of Gaelic learners and speakers, both local, national and international.

Over the past year, we’ve also heard frustration from members and Gaelic learners who feel cut off from community, and who aren’t even aware, perhaps, of Gaelic learners and events nearby. There’s a need, as Seattle’s Seumas Gagne has said, “to connect the nodes,” those nodes being local Gaelic Learning Communities and individuals throughout North America.

Those Gaelic Learning Communities may be defined by a specific location, such as Denver, Colorado, or a broader region, such as South-Central Virginia. They may be partially or completely online. The classes taught by the Atlantic Gaelic Academy could be considered a community, for example. Increasingly, they will be a mix of online and “offline” elements.

Several Gaelic Learning Communities are already present and visible on Facebook.

We will use location as a primary factor in identifying Gaelic Learning Communities but keep in mind that online connections that will not only bind local groups but larger networks together. And we will start with the study groups and classes known to and listed by ACGA. As we update our information, we will shift from listing those groups to listing Gaelic Learning Communities.

IV. Methodology and Questions

ACGA's Membership and Outreach Committee was tasked by the Board of Directors with surveying those teachers and study groups known to ACGA as a first step in identifying Gaelic Learning Communities and determining how ACGA could best assist them. Eventually, the survey will help ACGA create and publish a new list of Gaelic Learning Communities.

Board member Liam Ó Caiside developed 10 survey questions which were e-mailed to 27 individuals identified as study group leaders or teachers. These study groups are spread throughout the US and Canada. The questions are:

- Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?
- How frequently and when does the group meet?
- How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?
- Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?
- If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?
- What learning materials or resources do you use?
- If your group is not a class, formal or informal, what types of activities do you offer?
- Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?
- How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?
- Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

And finally:

- What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

A copy of the survey letter is included as an appendix to this report. To date, ACGA has received 15 replies. Copies of the raw data will be made available to board members.

V. Responses and Analysis

The responses came in from several areas, including: Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Toronto, Ontario.

a) *Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?*

Only two of the 15 respondents said no, and one of them plans to resume online classes shortly. However, many of the groups met irregularly or were extremely small, with one to three members at most. Exceptions were mainly in larger metropolitan areas: New York, Baltimore,

Maryland, Washington, DC, and Toronto, Canada. Denver and Boulder, Colorado, have a concentration of Gaelic learners (and ACGA members), though their number has dwindled.

Other areas to be included in future surveys are the Pacific Northwest (where Slighe nan Gàidheal offers classes in Seattle and groups are known to be active in Portland and Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia), and California and New England.

Interestingly, three respondents said they offer online courses, with two currently offering instruction only on an online basis. A fourth teacher plans to resume online courses this spring.

A large number (10) of the teachers/groups listed in An Naidheachd Againne did not respond to the survey, including two native speakers that have worked with ACGA in the past.

b) How frequently and when does the group meet?

Weekly and biweekly were the most common responses. Of the 15 respondents, five said they had classes or groups that met (or would soon meet) weekly. Five met biweekly. Three met monthly, one very irregularly, and one not at all.

Actually, it's more complicated than that. The Baltimore-rooted Gaelic Learning Community (Sgoil Gàidhlig Baile an Taigh Mhòr) meet every other week online and every six weeks in person, usually for a combined class/cèilidh.

c) How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

Here there was an obvious split between the online groups and the "physical" groups or classes. Study groups or classes tend to draw students from their local areas (New York, Toronto), though some reported members driving two or more hours to attend meetings (Springfield, Mo.). Online Gaelic classes draw students from practically everywhere, even outside North America, though in some cases the online groups focused on a particular region (Texas, Baltimore/DC).

d) Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

The vast majority of the respondents said their groups were focused on language classes or learning activities, not social activities. Nine of 15 said they offered classes. But several offered social activities as well as classes. Seven, perhaps, are straight-forward language classes or study groups. Many of the others offer a mix of language learning and social activities somehow related to Gàidhlig. Those activities could be more or less closely tied to the language.

Those that didn't offer classes offered: 1) a Gaelic song circle and potluck dinner; 2) Various day programs related to Gaelic culture, including a Hogmanay Party (Oidhche Challainn).

e) If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

Not surprisingly, most respondents said beginning to advanced. However, most seemed geared toward beginning to intermediate students.

f) What learning materials or resources do you use?

Interestingly, *Litir do Luchd Ionnsachadh* and *An Litir Bheag*, both from the BBC's Ruaraidh MacIleathain, were used by several of the respondents. *Beag air Bheag*, another BBC program, also was mentioned. Not surprisingly, *Speaking Our Language*, MacKinnon's *Teach Yourself Gaelic*, MacNeill's *Everyday Gaelic* and *Gaelic in 12 Weeks*, were used by others.

Several groups used materials provided or created by their own instructors. "Resources are pretty much my own private curriculum, based on building blocks I've developed," one instructor said. "I create them from scratch," said another. In one case, the instructor does not provide beginners with written materials.

g) Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

Six of the respondents said yes, while five answered no. Those who did not answer are probably "no goes," too. Some reasons people said they attended Highland Games and Celtic Festivals: "I go to such events and conduct Gaelic-language workshops"; "It's just a great place to ask questions about pronunciation, grammar, etc., and to be drawn out to actually speak the language out loud". The New York Caledonian Club, the heart of New York City's Gaelic Learning Community, in particular deserves kudos for sponsoring the North Carolina Gaelic Mòd at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games "to raise the status of the language."

Several of those who responded negatively said their groups were "too scattered"; that other organizations did such things; that they had attended games in the past but not recently.

h) How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

Only four of the respondents said they use social media to promote their groups, with Facebook, Twitter, and Meetup the three social media platforms most often used. Websites and e-mail also are used to keep in touch with members of the learning community.

i) Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

Five of the respondents said yes, they do have contact with other communities or groups, four said no. Breaking that down a bit, a couple of respondents supported local St. Andrew's Day events or societies, Burns Suppers, and other Scottish events, as opposed to Gaelic groups. Some were aware of other Gaelic-oriented groups, but had little interaction with them.

Opportunities for interaction naturally are greatest in areas where learning communities are close to each other. Gàidhlig Photomac, a group based in the Northern Virginia-DC-Maryland region, and Sgoil Ghàidhlig Bhaile an Taigh Mhòir in Baltimore have members who will meet at events, attend each other's events and are planning a joint event together.

j) What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

Not surprisingly, this question generated some long comments. A few are reprinted in full in the appendix to this report. Resources, publicity, and time were among the top items mentioned.

- “Biggest challenge is producing materials, as my exposure to the extremely effective *Say Something in Welsh* courses has convinced me that all existing Gaelic course materials that I have personally seen are inadequate. I would love to get some help from someone, preferably a native speaker, who could work with me in producing materials.”
- “The greatest challenge is getting the word out that NYCC does have Gaelic classes. ... One other concern is that when the students rise up to the intermediate level, they still need help and encouragement to continue improving their Gaelic, as well as opportunities to use their Gàidhlig in real-life situations.”
- “We have plenty of creative people with ideas, the problem is resources and time, and marketing. We've had nearly 50 people find us and contact us just through Meetup. Far fewer have paid a \$6 membership fee to support the service. We're looking for ways to fit our "node" into a larger network, and offer members more 'services,' such as actual language classes. This is an area where ACGA may be able to help.”
- “I would love to see ACGA develop a list of suggestions, guidelines, resources that would help new groups get off the ground, help existing groups know how to work with new learners and it would be great if ACGA would serve as more of a funnel to send interested persons to various groups.”
- “My biggest struggle is one of time versus impact. I have seven classes, each with one, two or three students, and I feel at times that I could reach more people with the same time invested. I have thought about joining (Atlantic Gaelic Academy) as a teacher ... If there were an equivalent class structure under ACGA, and we got existing teachers here to take turns teaching for a set of classes, we might get more efficient.”
- “The language should ideally be something spoken within a local community that does various activities together ... The internet is ironically isolating people more and more at the same time it is connecting us across vast distances.”

VI. Supplementary Individual Responses

A post about this survey on Facebook was shared 16 times and reached 2,085 people (and counting). That's an impressive performance. As a result, about a dozen people requested copies of the survey. These were individuals, not teachers or study group leaders, looking for information on Gaelic-learning opportunities. Comments included:

- "I'm with the United Scottish Clans of Oklahoma. I'm in charge of promoting Gaidhlig. There are very few of us now, but we hope to grow."
- "I'm part of multiple Gaelic learning "communities" in Ontario and Canada. I'd be interested in your survey please." "An cuir sibh an suirbhidh ugam? 'S ann á Chicago a tha mi. Taing dhuibh!"
- "I'm currently learning Gaelic near Kansas City, MO and would love to find something nearby."

Surveys were e-mailed to all who requested them and about 10 responses were received. These responses will be used to help hone a "second-phase" survey.

VII. Conclusions

Interest in Scottish Gaelic is widespread and either growing or at least constant in the US and Canada (there's a broad range that includes those with long-term, short-term and "recurrent" interest). However, 33 years after ACGA was established in 1984, it's still very difficult for Gaelic learners to find classes, study groups or a community to help pursue their interest.

Yes, the situation is better than in 1984 in many ways, largely thanks to the Internet. The growth of online classes and communities such as the Atlantic Gaelic Academy is reason for optimism. But there's little or no coordination to help match Gaelic learners with the appropriate learning community or group. Finding resources, even those available online, is a struggle.

And there's reason to be concerned about the health of the established Gaelic Learning Communities. Only 15 of the 27 study group leaders and teachers know to ACGA replied to this survey. Among the "missing" were two native speakers who have taught at ACGA immersion events and held, in the past, regular classes. Some of those that responded pointed to a decline in the number of learners in their groups and, in some cases, the cessation of activities.

Clearly, there's a need that's not being met, and a new plan needs to be developed to help encourage and support Gaelic Learning Communities (see "IX. Suggested Actions").

Larger metropolitan areas tend to have more active Gaelic Learning Communities, largely thanks to population density (New York) and perhaps to the presence of native Gaelic speakers (Toronto). It's no surprise that groups were identified based around Toronto, New York, Seattle, Washington, DC, Baltimore and Denver. There are smaller groups in cities including Springfield, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri.

What's surprising is the lack of identifiable groups in cities such as Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, Boston and Los Angeles. It's quite possible they exist, but aren't known to us.

Online classes more and more connect those learners isolated from other students or Gaelic speakers. They may live in urban or rural areas.

Most Gaelic Learning Communities, though not all, are more focused on language classes and study groups than on other areas of Gaelic culture or more social pastimes. A few use events and special programs, such as immersion days and socials, to facilitate the use of Gaelic.

In any case, regular events on a monthly or biweekly basis, if not weekly, are important to keeping a Gaelic Learning Community active and alive. The events may be classes, or classes intermixed with other activities. A healthy mix of events could foster greater cohesion.

Despite the number of Gaelic-language courses and textbooks released in the last 30-40 years (remember Can Seo?) there's no one standard embraced by all. Some materials likely have become rapidly outdated as technology changes how people learn.

VIII. Suggested Actions

This survey spotlights the existence of Gaelic Learning Communities and the need to develop a flexible plan and framework for addressing their needs and supporting their growth.

Our conclusion is that a new approach to community organizing, not just language teaching, is necessary to help these Gaelic Learning Communities, and the language, grow and flourish.

Based on what we've learned to date, here are some suggested actions.

1. Supporting Gaelic Learning Communities should be recognized as a fundamental role and responsibility of ACGA as a North American organization. If not ACGA, who?
2. This role should be recognized as a board-level, multi-functional responsibility, and pursued by ACGA's board in cooperation with all of ACGA's committees.
3. ACGA should work with other organizations, including Slighe nan Gàidheal and Comunn Gàidhlig Toronto, which is working on a Gaelic Language Growth Strategy.
4. A second, more broad-based "GLC" survey should be designed and executed via SurveyMonkey or another web-based service over the summer of 2017.

5. Better communications need to be established between ACGA and existing Gaelic Language Communities. This entails a rethinking of our communications strategy(ies).
6. ACGA should, on its website, refocus its “Learn Gaelic” section on Gaelic Learning Communities. Those communities should be mapped online, with links.
7. ACGA should identify and consider creating services and/or products that could help these communities and community organizers set up programs and events.
8. ACGA, at its events (Grandfather Mountain Gaelic Song and Language Week and the U.S. National Mòd should discuss the concept of Gaelic Learning Communities.

All this admittedly constitutes a cultural change for ACGA, an organization already reevaluating its mission and how it can best provide value to its members. Change is inevitable, however, and necessary, and the concept of Gaelic Learning Communities is one ACGA should support.

In helping to “connect the nodes” in the growing network of these communities, ACGA will be performing an invaluable service that should also help the organization attract and retain members. That shouldn’t, however, be seen as the primary goal, but a result of our efforts.

— Liam Ó Caiside

IX. Appendices

These appendices include copies of some of the most pertinent responses submitted to ACGA in its initial Gaelic Learning Communities survey. Full responses will be made available on request.

1. Reese McKay, Denver, Colorado:

- 1) I currently do loosely run our Gaelic conversation group that meets at Stella's Coffee House in Denver, usually one Saturday each month, 9:30 to 11:30 am. We pick which Saturday we will meet depending on finding a Saturday when at least three of us will be in town. So, it varies.
- 2) I send out an email to a list of about 20 people. But, realistically only three of us consistently show up – Glenn Wrightson, Rudy Ramsey, and myself. We have two or three others who live locally who will come on a rare occasion. We have two others who live between 100 and 200 miles away who will come if they happen to be in Denver on the Saturday we are meeting at Stella's.
- 3) Most of us live within 30 miles north or south of Denver. As mentioned, two members of our group live 100 or 200 miles away and come maybe once a year when possible.
- 4) It is purely a conversation group. Sometimes one of us brings a one or two-page story to read aloud and translate.
- 5) We no longer use any particular learning materials.
- 6) We no longer attend the local highland games. We used to do a Gaelic tent each year at Estes Park – Longs Peak Scottish Irish Festival -- but not recently. I did most of the work for the past 10 years, and only got help from the same three people each year. We seemed to get fewer and fewer signs of interest from people at that event. We attracted perhaps three or four people to engage in Sue Hendrix's Boulder Gaelic Study Group, over a period of about the last 12 years. None of those stuck around for more than a few months.
- 7) People can contact me by this email address.
- 8) I am involved in Sue Hendrix's study group. Glenn, Rudy, and I are also part of a Skype Gaelic conversation group with Cam MacRae, Janice Chan, Jeanne Pendergast, Ann Landin, and a few others. Some of us are long-time members of ACGA. Some of us go to Cape Breton or Grandfather Mountain occasionally. Some of us have other Skype connections, etc.

The Colorado community of Gaelic learners exists almost entirely due to the tireless efforts of Glenn Wrightson from the period starting about 1997 and continuing through about 2005. During that time Glenn taught (I believe) four levels of Gaelic classes, one after another, on each Saturday for two semesters each year. We even hosted two ACGA Gaelic immersion weekends in Boulder (2001 and 2003?), and later two more in Colorado Springs (after Glenn had stopped teaching classes, approximately 2007 and 2009?). During the years from about 1998 to 2003 we had a peak of perhaps 24 people studying Gaelic fairly regularly at Glenn's classes. The study group at Sue's house had as many as seven or eight people on a given Monday night, with most of those being "regulars," and we had as many as four or five others who came occasionally. We have five regulars now, and we will get a new person about once each year. Most of those drop out after two or three months with a few notable exceptions who went on to study Gaelic elsewhere.

Over the years since then, no one has stepped up to teach any regular classes in Gaelic in Colorado to my knowledge, although Caroline Root (who started studying Gaelic with Glenn the same year I did, 1998) has done two or three Colorado immersion weekends and also teaches classes online. From about the time Glenn stopped teaching until now we have suffered a great deal of attrition. We have gone from as many as 30 people participating in either Glenn's classes or Sue's study group (or both), to three regulars at Stella's and five regulars at Sue's. At least 8 people who have dropped out dedicated at least four years studying Gaelic with Glenn, and possibly all of those still live within 40 miles of Denver. Some or all are either on my email list or Sue's email list.

Caroline has been doing a lot online, but lives in a very remote part of the state now. Just now she has a one-year old baby. Perhaps after her child is a bit older she will be able to become more active again.

Aside from Caroline, every one of our Gaelic learners who is under 40 has moved away from Colorado over the past 15 years (with one other possible exception). All of our currently active learners/teachers and conversation participants are over 60 except for Caroline Root and one member of Sue's study group.

Of course there may be a few people I am totally unaware of simply studying Gaelic online through BBC materials, whatever they can find on You Tube, AGA classes, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, or with Caroline Root or other teachers.

I don't have any particular ideas for what to do for outreach or to get people interested again. If someone were to start teaching regular classes in Denver again, that could generate some new people (younger hopefully), but I'm somewhat of the opinion that Glenn Wrightson's success in attracting a fairly large number of people to study Gaelic was a one-time event. So much has changed since then, and we made a strong connection with only about seven or eight people under 35 years old over the entire 20 year period to the best of my memory. I'm not a pessimist by nature, and would love to be wrong about this. Part of the problem (possibly a good problem) is alluded to in my previous paragraph. People can bypass ACGA, Sue's study group, or any other organized group teaching Gaelic – by going online and finding a wealth of resources that all of us could have only dreamed of 15 or 20 years ago. But, it is still a problem in my view, because language should ideally be something spoken within a local community that does various activities together, like we once did back when Glenn was teaching classes. The internet is ironically isolating people more and more at the same time it is connecting us across vast distances. I think the losses of local connectivity may be greater than the gains of long distance connectivity in some important ways.

2. Barbara Lynn Rice, New York, N.Y.

The New York Caledonian Club's Scottish Studies program runs 10-week class sessions that meet on Tuesday evenings during the fall and spring in NYC. Classes include Scottish Gaelic Conversation (beginning to intermediate), a Reading class (intermediate), & a Scottish Gaelic Grammar class on the beginning and intermediate levels. NYCC also offers a Scottish Song class that includes songs in Gaelic, Scots, and English. These are all group classes taught in person by experienced teachers for students who live within commuting distance of New York City.

The Grammar class text book is Roderick MacKinnon's *Gaelic (Teach Yourself Books)*. The Reading class reads various novels and short stories published in Gaelic, and for the Conversation class, various materials are used such as Morag MacNeill's *Everyday Gaelic*.

NYCC has also begun to hold a workshop series, showcasing among other subjects, Scottish Gaelic singing. It has been fortunate to have Christine Primrose recently teach a Gaelic song workshop, and before that, presented a concert with Gillebride MacMillan & Kyle Carey.

When there is an event related to the classes, the NYCC Scottish Studies Chairperson passes it along to the students via email and announcements at the classes.

NYCC will once again this year sponsor the North Carolina Gaelic Mòd at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games (website: <http://gmhg.org/corporatesponsors.htm>), as it has for several years past, in order to raise the status of the language and has also hosted informal Gaelic sing-alongs at the Long Island Scottish Games.

Anyone may either email the Chairperson directly or through the NYCC website, www.nycaledonian.org. NYCC posts the classes on its Facebook and Twitter pages, and the Chairperson will also share the information on other social media as well. When the Club hears from other Gaelic groups, the contact is either directly to the Club, through an email blast or from contacts that come through members.

The greatest challenge is getting the word out that NYCC does have Gaelic classes. Marketing has improved somewhat in the past few years, but it has been usually left almost entirely to the Chairperson to keep plugging for the program. One other concern is that when the students rise up to the intermediate level, they still need help and encouragement to continue improving their Gaelic, as well as opportunities to use their Gàidhlig in real-life situations.

3. Michael Newton, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Although I was teaching a Gaelic class formally a year ago (3 Saturdays a month), and it went very well with a strong turnout (between 12 and 20 people), and I'm pretty sure that it could have continued in the same fashion, I am too busy to offer it this year. Preparing lessons took a lot of time.

Instead, Stephanie and I are hosting a Gaelic song circle/céilidh the first Saturday of the month in our home, which is followed by a potluck. We are not asking for money, but it is a small, exclusive group (3-6 each week), given that it takes place in our living room.

Stephanie has continued to work on an initial set of songs that she selected (from a variety of sources), but we take requests and occasionally one of our participants brings a song to teach. I usually discuss the historical and cultural background to the songs, and of course pronunciation, but not much on grammar at this point.

Most people live within 20 miles. Yes, people who may be interested are welcome to contact me via email. We have not done anything as a group outside our classes/ceilidhs to date, but we are hoping to work up to that, should we be cohesive long enough.

My biggest problem is time, given a demanding job and a small child.

An dochas gum bi seo gu feum.

4. Michael Mackay, Catlett, Virginia

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

Yes, I have seven groups going at the moment. One class is writing and working with an Litir Bheag, two are writing and working with an Litir, one is just working with an Litir, one is exclusively conversation at a fluent level, one is a little language plus working on songs, and one is almost purely writing and working on vocabulary and pronunciation. Emphasis for all my classes is a natural and organic Gaelic expression in phrases and vocabulary, as well as correct pronunciation. All of my classes have advanced significantly in both those areas, and, even though progress at times is slow, they are learning the “whole package” as they go, so that they will not have to go back and re-learn pronunciation once they have grammar or vocabulary. All classes are done via skype.

How frequently and when does the group meet?

Each class meets weekly as schedules allow. Usually the classes are done from 7pm until 9 pm. At times, there are make-up classes as needed.

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

Most live far away, from California to southern VA.

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

It's mostly Gaelic language as a focus, but in every class, we have fun and share things that are going on. Skype makes it difficult to do a social event that happens to focus on Gaelic.

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

All levels, from advanced beginner to fluent.

What learning materials or resources do you use?

Resources are pretty much my own private curriculum, based on building blocks I've developed, plus vocabulary, plus pronunciation, plus an Litir Bheag or Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh.

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

No, we are too scattered to do things as a group. The SGEIR group used to have retreats, which were very successful, but you need planners and organizers to do such a thing, and when the SGEIR organizers got too busy (and dropped out of the group), the retreats ended.

How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

They email me, pretty much exclusively. I don't use social media. This may be a way for ACGA to help, actually. I wouldn't take the time to set something up for myself, but if there's value in having a social media presence, in which a group of study groups is put in one place, making contact can be easier, and intercommunication would be better. Study groups can reach out to other teachers or groups for answers to questions, advice, pronunciation help, etc. We don't have a way to tap into this network of resources.

Do you have contact with other study groups or “communities”?

Usually no – see above. Just ACGA as a whole, and there's currently no great reason to do so in the conduct of the groups. Many of my students have, for example, contributed to ANA, which they have found to me quite rewarding, and that's probably just the tip of the iceberg for what could be done.

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

My biggest struggle is one of time versus impact. I have seven classes, each with one, two or three students, and I feel at times that I could reach more people with the same time invested. Each class is focused on their own things, but there is much commonality – and adding 5-10 others to any given class would not be a greater burden but it would provide greater benefit. I have thought about joining AGA as a teacher, but I can't say that I like their approach

or curriculum, and their CB Gaelic is, shockingly, not mine – I would find it hard to teach the pronunciation they want, or the expressions. I'm now much more a Lewis speaker. If there were an equivalent class structure under ACGA, and we got existing teachers here to take turns teaching for a set of classes, we might get more efficient.

5. An Phillips, Greensboro, North Carolina

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

Yes - Study group

How frequently and when does the group meet?

Second Sunday of each Month

How big an area do you draw members from?

Raleigh/Durham/Wake Forest/ Cary

Do most live close by? No

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

Language

What learning materials or resources do you use?

Depends on what the group members have already purchased. If no materials I prefer Beag air Bheag online.

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

Yes. Triad Highland Games in Greensboro and Bethabara Park in Winston-Salem NC

How may people contact you?

2 -3 a month but many do not ever come to the meetings. Does your group use social media for outreach? No but I should start this.

Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

Yes.

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

Regular meeting space. If the Library has an event we have nowhere to go.

6. Janice Chan, Toronto

I am "the current people", along with Kerrie Kennedy, as we have been for the past 20 years. There is a contact email address on our website, torontogaelic.ca.

We are currently working with the Toronto Gaelic Society to try to find ways of expanding Gaelic in Ontario and we've been speaking with Chris Harvey, who teaches at University of Toronto in the field of language revitalisation.

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

- Yes

How frequently and when does the group meet?

- Every Saturday morning during the academic year (September - April) since 1997. Before that the group was active under David Livingston-Lowe. Rob Dunbar was a founder of the classes, but Kerrie and I took over in 1997 and created the name "Comann Luchd-Ionnsachaidh Thoronto".

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

- Greater Toronto Area (includes Mississauga, Hamilton)

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

- Gaelic language classes. We currently have 3 instructors.

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

- beginner to advanced

What learning materials or resources do you use?

- Scottish Gaelic in 312 Weeks
- Teach Yourself Gaelic
- Ceumannan
- videos / sound files from various sources

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

- No. We have a sister organisation (Toronto Gaelic Society) that does that sort of thing

How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

- Mostly through our website torontogaelic.ca. We have a Facebook page, which is public, so people can share information easily.

Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

- Toronto Gaelic Society, which has existed in some form since the late 1850s. They focus more on the social aspect of Gaeldom and a number of native speakers are members.

They also sponsor twice yearly Cànan agus Òran workshops that are all-day events with invited instructors (Cathy Ann MacPhee for example) and instructors from Nova Scotia (Margie Beaton will be at the April 8 workshop).

7. Caroline Root, Colorado

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

Not currently but I have been thinking about starting one as I now have 3 local students. My other Gaelic activity is all online .

How frequently and when does the group meet?

I have classes and individual lessons that mostly meet weekly. A few meet fortnightly.

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

I have 3 local students, others are from all over the US and a few in Europe.

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

Classes

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

Right now I am teaching beginner, intermediate and advanced classes.

What learning materials or resources do you use?

I use Speaking Our Language, BBC Alba, Story books, whatever online resources I can find and my own workbook.

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

No.

How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

Yes , not sure how many people but around 25 students and about 4500 likes on FB.

Do you have contact with other study groups or “communities”?

Not really.

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

I am always looking for engaging resources that make it easier for people to practice Gaelic . Because a lot of my students are isolated from other learners the main problem is finding a way for them to be able to practice outside of class time.

8. Scott Morrison, Baltimore

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

Yes

How frequently and when does the group meet?

every other week on skype, in person every 6 wks

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

from PA down to central VA. Many are in the Baltimore area.

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

both

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

right now, beginners, but we are working on an intermediate level sub group starting soon.

What learning materials or resources do you use?

we are using a mixture of the Taic.me.uk lessons, Complete Gaelic textbook, and some AGA materials

If your group is not a class, formal or informal, what types of activities do you offer?

We also offer in-person conversation sessions on wed's in Baltimore during the "off weeks"

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

Yes, Southern MD and the Frederick games

How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

We get a new name about once every 5 weeks or so, but there are currently 19 names on our email list. We also maintain an updated wordpress web site.

Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

Not as of yet

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

Well, we have the usual issue of people dropping out due to work/family conflicts, change of interest, possibly disappointment in the difficulty/strangeness of the language, etc. We do want to expand our presence and work with other groups. We are still new, and we are currently "building the plane while flying it" as it were. We would like to begin to host our own events like weekend immersions (as SGEIR used to do), song classes, and/or host guest speakers/presenters/teachers. We also plan on hosting fundraiser activities in conjunction with Liam Flynn (a student and supporter of ours) next year to possibly fund one of these events. We are not opposed to combining resources with another organization to make these happen! :) If ACGA can help us in any way, we would welcome whatever they can offer.

9. Traci Kennebeck, Springfield, Illinois

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

YES

How frequently and when does the group meet?

FIRST AND THIRD SATURDAYS 1-4pm at the Springfield Lincoln Library. If people can only make one meetup each month, the first Saturday is more well attended.

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

A 2 hour radius is the main area of draw, although we've had people from 4 different states joining us at a single class (IL, MO, KY, IN)

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

Language learning driven

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

We have a variety of learners, so it's geared for all from Gaelic-curious to longtime learners.

What learning materials or resources do you use?

Of course we all bring our piles of books :) We do different participant led activities including reading from printed An Litir Bheag sheets or just asking each other questions regarding objects (numbers, colors, etc)

If your group is not a class, formal or informal, what types of activities do you offer?

See above answer. Plus it's just a great place to ask questions about pronunciation, grammar, etc. And to be drawn out to actually speak the language out loud.

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

Not yet

Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

Not formally. We hear a lot about certain groups, experiences, schools, etc from Cam. I share a bit about what I'm learning from my distance learning course.

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

From me: I think when I showed up as a new learner at this study group a year ago, they didn't know what to do with me. There are still times where we don't know what to 'do' while we are meeting. I would love to see ACGA develop a list of suggestions/guidelines/resources that would help new groups get off the ground, help existing groups know how to work with new learners and it would be great if ACGA would serve as more of a funnel to send interested persons to various groups.

From another student in the group: I like that the ACGA's putting this together. Even something as simple as a directory with a calendar of Gaelic or Scottish cultural events (or budget-friendly trips abroad?) would be nice. That way, we could visit neighboring groups or possibly join in planning efforts.

Also, a solid list of language learning resources would be nice.

10. David Gressett, Texas

Do you currently run a study group or other Gaelic-oriented group?

Not at present, but I am planning to resume soon, as I mentioned above

How frequently and when does the group meet?

Once a week for each group of students.

How big an area do you draw members from? Do most live close by?

Since it is done with Skype on internet, in principle, students can come from anywhere, but in practice, they are in Texas.

Is the group a Gaelic-language class or a social group focused on Gaelic?

Gaelic language.

If your group is a class, what level(s) of instruction are offered?

Introductory.

What learning materials or resources do you use?

I create them from scratch. The general flow of structure in terms of grammar learned is taken from the Teach Yourself Gaelic book, but someone observing the class would not easily detect that. The actual teaching method is something that I lifted from a Welsh course that I found on the Internet. (Google for "Say Something in Welsh")

Does your group attend events such as Highland Games or festivals?

I do, and sometimes meet with students in person, and I go to such events and conduct Gaelic-language workshops.

How may people contact you? Does your group use social media for outreach?

E-mail is the best contact method. I am not currently using social media, but I may do so in the future.

Do you have contact with other study groups or "communities"?

No, but I would like to do so.

What challenges do you face in organizing and maintaining your group or class, and what type of assistance or resources might be helpful?

Biggest challenge is producing materials, as my exposure to the extremely effective Say Something in Welsh courses has convinced me that all existing Gaelic course materials that I have personally seen are inadequate. I would love to get some help from someone, preferably a native speaker, who could work with me in producing materials, (which would be entirely audio materials; me learners will get no written materials until they are well into their studies.)