

**FURTHERING THE DISCUSSION OF
GENERAL EDUCATION AT KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

FALL 2007



**2007-2008 GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE
Kansas State University**

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2007-2008 General Education Task Force
Fall 2007

NOTE: This document is a working document – a work in progress. The General Education Task Force will apprise you of progress and updates as they occur.

We are making this document available as a preamble to beginning the discussion of these ideas with the campus community. Our task is to develop and write a full proposal to present to the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee within the 2007-2008 academic year.

On August 31 of 2007, Provost Nellis charged the 2007-2008 General Education Task Force to review the previous Task Forces' recommendations in order to develop a proposal for the university community, to share a proposed general education curriculum plan with the university community and solicit feedback, to fine tune the proposal based on feedback from the university community, and to submit a final proposal to Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee early in 2008.

Obviously, this is an aggressive timeline. Members of the 2007-2008 General Education Task Force recognize the work that lies ahead to accomplish much in a short time but are committed to making the effort. Our work has already begun. We intend to share ideas as we work to accomplish the task and ask that other members of the university community join with us by considering the ideas presented in this document and in open forums to be scheduled late this fall semester and early spring semester. We solicit critique with an eye to creating a new system of general education that will truly benefit the undergraduate students of Kansas State University.

The ideas presented in this draft culminate from the discussions and recommendations of five groups charged during the past 4 years by two provosts – Provost James Coffman and Provost Duane Nellis. Following is a brief description of this past work.

Spring 2003. During the spring of 2003, an ad hoc group of faculty and administrators held several brainstorming sessions about the future of general education at Kansas State University. As a result of their discussions, two working committees were established in the fall of 2003 – the UGE Procedures Committee and the General Education Steering Committee.

October 2003. The UGE Procedures Committee was charged by Provost Coffman in October 2003 to identify immediate, workable solutions to specific problems that were currently troubling UGE. They submitted their recommendations for action to the UGE Council and the UGE Inter-College Coordination Panel in December of 2003. Subsequent actions were taken by both groups.

November 2003. Meanwhile, the General Education Steering Committee was charged by Provost Coffman in November 2003 to develop and implement procedures for a campus-wide solicitation of ideas and proposals about the future of general education at K-State, and to promote and support a creative discussion among the many facets of the university community. The Steering Committee was not specifically responsible for an ultimate outcome but was charged to put the process in

motion. The committee surveyed K-State faculty and students about general education and solicited ideas from faculty about a redesign. They submitted their report to Provost Nellis in December of 2004.

December 2005. In December of 2005, Provost Nellis charged the General Education Task Force to review the work of the General Education Steering Committee, consider the recommendation of the Higher Learning Commission regarding the assessment of general education and its alignment with K-State’s undergraduate student learning outcomes, become familiar with the HLC’s criteria for accreditation that address general education, and develop a recommendation for a general education plan for K-State. Members met bi-weekly, considered information and research from numerous sources, attended the AAC&U Institute on General Education, and conducted “listening meetings” with representatives from the eight undergraduate Colleges and with other persons and groups from all over campus. The Task Force submitted their recommendations to Provost Nellis in June of 2007.

August 2007. Provost Nellis charged the 2007-2008 General Education Task Force with the tasks described at the beginning of this introduction.

The following document is presented in three sections.

Section 1 presents a summary of the recommendations.

Section 2 explains further elements of the plan, as it is currently being considered.

Section 3 offers recommendations related to the implementation of the plan.

2007-2008 General Education Task Force

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Section 1: Executive Summary of Recommendations

The 2007-2008 Task Force on General Education is developing a new plan for general education at Kansas State University based on recommendations made by the 2006-2007 General Education Task Force.

1. K-State should build on the strengths of the current UGE system, specifically its understanding of the purpose of general education and its commitment to effective student learning and pedagogy.

2. K-State should design a new system of general education to ensure that every student "acquires a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that [are the] hallmarks of being college educated." (from the Higher Learning Commission's Statement on General Education)

A. Foundation for Breadth. The University should adopt a university-wide general education program that guides students toward building a broad foundation of knowledge through courses and/or experiences in eight areas. At least six of these eight requirements (or roughly eighteen credit hours) must have course numbers that are outside of the department or program responsible for the student's undergraduate major.

- Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding
- Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning
- Ethical Reasoning and Social Responsibility
- Global Community
- Human Diversity in the U.S.
- Individuals within Social Systems
- The Natural and Physical World
- The Past and the Future

B. Communication and Critical Thinking. All undergraduate majors should offer students numerous opportunities to develop competencies in communication skills and critical thinking. All K-State undergraduates should purposefully seek courses and experiences that will challenge them to become proficient in these skills.

3. K-State must develop an assessment program for general education. The Task Force recommends a program focused on Kansas State University's undergraduate student learning outcomes. Assessment strategies will include standardized tests (reading, critical thinking, writing) as well as integrative projects in capstone courses and other measurements yet to be created by interdisciplinary groups of faculty and other professionals.

Section 2: Recommendations for a General Education Plan

1. Building on the Strengths of the Current UGE Plan

K-State should build on the important strengths of the current UGE system, specifically its understanding of the purpose of general education and its commitment to student learning.

1.1 The Purpose of "General Education"

The General Education Task Force believes that the statement of purpose set forth in KSU's 1994 University General Education Proposal continues to serve as a significant guiding vision for the development of a new program for general education at Kansas State University.

[G]eneral education at Kansas State University should expand the experiences and vision our undergraduates carry forward in the conduct of their lives and should help students develop the interest and capacity for improving and enriching life. This purpose of general education can be addressed by targeting learning outcomes that characterize a preferred state of mind and habits of mind for Kansas State graduates. We envision graduates disposed to appreciate differing viewpoints, to consider openly new and divergent thinking, to weigh ideas with careful skepticism, to challenge conventional wisdom, and to explore for more accurate and more useful knowledge. We would expect K-State graduates to exercise educated habits, which include, at least, critical and analytical thinking, careful and thoughtful reading, writing and speech, an inclination to wonder, a penchant for questioning, and a desire to solve puzzles and problems. When that occurs, an undergraduate degree signals more than specialized competence for a career.

We have adopted the 2006-2007 Task Force's definition of "general education" – *that part of university learning shared by all students. It is intended to provide broad exposure to multiple disciplines and to form the basis for developing important intellectual and social competencies. It is the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes important to learning throughout life.*

This definition and the guiding vision set out in 1994 clearly represent general education as a means or as a beginning, not as an end in itself, and they reflect the same set of comprehensive goals framed by K-State's university-wide student learning outcomes.

Undergraduate student learning outcomes (From KSU Undergraduate Catalog)

Kansas State University strives to create an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and growth, one in which academic freedom, breadth of thought and action, and individual empowerment are valued and flourish. We endeavor to prepare citizens who will continue to learn and will contribute to the societies in which they live and work.

Students share in the responsibility for a successful university educational experience. Upon completion of their degree, all undergraduates are expected to demonstrate ability in at least five essential areas.

Knowledge. Students will demonstrate a depth of knowledge and apply the methods of inquiry in a discipline of their choosing, and they will demonstrate a breadth of knowledge across their choice of varied disciplines.

Critical Thinking. Students will demonstrate the ability to access and interpret information, respond and adapt to changing situations, make complex decisions, solve problems, and evaluate actions.

Communication. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

Diversity. Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the skills necessary to live and work in a diverse world.

Academic and Professional Integrity. Students will demonstrate awareness and understanding of the ethical standards of their academic discipline and/or profession.

In light of these essential student learning outcomes (SLOs) and the stated purpose of general education, we propose adopting a new plan that will ensure broad exposure to many disciplines, assist students in developing proficiencies in communication and critical thinking, and permit a more systematic assessment of general education. Thus, *we recommend that the new general education plan (outlined more specifically in the recommendations to follow) be founded upon the university undergraduate SLOs and the understanding of general education set forth in 1994.*

1.2 The Importance of Pedagogy

The Task Force reaffirms the importance of effective pedagogy to general education. The current UGE system is defined in part by a unique commitment to student learning and pedagogies that emphasize active learning, experiential context, integrative learning, and developing advanced writing skills. Such approaches constitute one of the great strengths of UGE.

The teaching and learning principles that currently define UGE are not, however, specifically "general education" pedagogies. They are simply effective pedagogies. Attention to assessment, outstanding teaching faculty, and the development of programs for teaching improvement have contributed to this innovation and improvement in teaching at K-State. Indeed, as the recent pedagogical innovation at K-State demonstrates, these practices are slowly permeating the entire teaching and learning enterprise.

Thus, *while we recommend putting aside the current UGE emphasis on pedagogy as a defining element of what is considered to be general education*, we would like to see these innovative pedagogical principles and best practices continued throughout all K-State curricula.

2. Providing for Breadth of Knowledge and Proficiency in Skills

K-State should design a new system of general education to ensure that every student builds “a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that [are the] hallmarks of being college educated” (Higher Learning Commission’s Statement on General Education). Such a system should have a set of specific goals and a clear curricular structure to ensure that those goals are attained.

2.1 General Education Goals: Building a Foundation for Breadth of Knowledge

We recommend that the University adopt a university-wide general education goal to guide students toward building a broad foundation of knowledge to include the human experience, the natural world, and social responsibility through courses and experiences in eight specific areas: Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding, Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning, Ethical Reasoning and Social Responsibility, Global Community, Human Diversity in the U.S., Individuals within Social Systems, The Natural and Physical World, and The Past and the Future.

The Task Force has created a plan of general education at K-State that encourages students to be intellectual explorers. By requiring students to take a mix of classes to experience the academic learning reflected in K-State's undergraduate student learning outcomes, we expect students will begin to develop a diverse set of "literacies" that reflect a breadth of general knowledge. This broad exposure aims to awaken and ignite students' interest in varying disciplines, while also teaching the knowledge and skills expected of college-educated individuals.

Students and faculty would review and plan programs of study to include exposure to a breadth of learning, with at least one three-credit hour course (or an equivalent) in each of the eight areas. At least six of the areas must be covered with courses outside the student's major. Courses in the eight areas cannot substitute for the credit hours in the Common Degree Requirements: Expository Writing (six credit hours) and Public Speaking (two credits).

Thus, in terms of credit hours, all K-State undergraduates will take at least 24 hours of general education. Six of these hours may count toward a student's major, but at least 18 of these hours will be taken outside the major.

The eight specific areas are each described in more detail on the following pages. A brief description is provided, along with a rationale for including the area in building a broad foundation of knowledge. To reiterate, the phrase "building a broad foundation of knowledge" was carefully chosen by the Task Force. There is no expectation that students will do more than begin the process of creating their own structures for a breadth of knowledge. However, by exploring these eight areas, students will establish a foundation on which to build throughout a lifetime of learning.

Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding

Rationale: The arts provide us with something more than knowledge of traditions, beliefs, and forms of expression; they also teach us to observe carefully, to reflect, to appreciate, to wonder, and to see objects and interactions with new eyes. In a world filled with complex and ambiguous signs, skill in reading and interpreting such signs not only enriches one's emotional and intellectual life, but also enables one to fathom meanings that might be crucial to how one leads life. Artistic works can heighten one's curiosity, intensify one's aesthetic and observational capacities, and sharpen one's ability to make sense of a range of works from sacred texts to contemporary popular music, from ancient architecture to television and film. An understanding of artistic and cultural traditions is an important component of preparing for a lifetime of civic and cultural engagement.

Description: Artistic expressions—the visual arts, theatre, music, dance, literature—carry meaning and invite interpretation. Understanding the characteristics of various forms of artistic expression and the ability to interpret such works can expand the observers' perceptions and enrich individual lives. Courses and experiences in aesthetic experience and interpretive understanding will provide students with the opportunity to develop their interpretive skills and heighten their aesthetic responses to literature, the performing arts, and the visual arts.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- analyze, interpret, and aesthetically respond to literary texts, artistic performances, and/or works of art by drawing on differing historical, cultural, or theoretical perspectives;
- develop their critical thinking skills, including their ability to reflect on, speculate about and describe the meaning of artistic works, performances, and/or texts; and
- identify and evaluate the role of literature and the arts in society; understand how artistic expressions reflect, interact, and influence society, history, and culture.

Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning

Rationale: All individuals are faced with the inevitable task of evaluating available information in order to make decisions. These may range from choices that are personal (e.g., whether or not to undergo particular medical treatments or how to prepare for retirement) to those that affect the community (e.g., evaluating statistical data to make policy recommendations). The ability to examine and describe relationships among concepts and ideas using logical reasoning (based on observed, intuitive, scientific, theoretical and other forms of data) allows individuals to solve problems across a variety of situations.

Description: Empirical and quantitative reasoning includes the use of scientific and mathematical skills to observe, measure, compare, and describe information and data. Students explore how to make decisions and draw conclusions based on empirical data. Courses and experiences in empirical and quantitative reasoning provide students the opportunity to learn how to gather and evaluate information, weigh alternative evidence, understand the likelihood of particular outcomes, and recognize when available evidence is inadequate to draw a conclusion.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- understand and describe the importance of logical and empirical methods to determine and express relationships between properties or concepts;
- solve complex, real-world problems through the application of appropriate strategies and the use of logical reasoning skills; and
- apply basic skills and knowledge using appropriate methods for gathering, analyzing and displaying data to draw conclusions.

Ethical Reasoning and Social Responsibility

Rationale: Students must be exposed to a variety of ethical perspectives and multiple ways of resolving ethical dilemmas in order to be socially responsible. Citizens and human beings face a variety of decisions in their lives regarding right conduct within society: For which candidate should I vote? Which policy is best? How should I react to discrimination when I encounter it? How can I resolve this family dilemma? Because humans exist within social groups, ethical reasoning must include consideration of others. Therefore, social engagement and responsibility is the context in which ethical reasoning occurs. Educated people should be able to discern and reflect upon the broader impact of their individual actions.

Description: Ethics refers to the study of the standards by which human behavior and interactions can be considered right or wrong—defining the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and how we make these determinations. Social responsibility includes the ability to apply ethical standards to societal issues. One considers many related questions when examining ethical decision-making. Courses and experiences in ethical reasoning and social responsibility should assist students in learning how to think through ethical dilemmas and make sound decisions when facing real-life situations.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- exhibit basic awareness and understanding of ethical dilemmas and standards for resolution of ethical dilemmas;
- apply emerging skills to address ethical dilemmas using sound strategies and principles; and
- recognize and articulate the importance of social responsibility as an essential component of ethical reasoning.

Global Community

Rationale: A global perspective is imperative for K-State graduates who will live and work within a global community throughout their lives. Current global challenges are issues of great importance that affect all individuals and nations -- challenges such as economic globalization, the impact of rapidly developing technology, immigration and migration policies and consequences, global health priorities and resolutions, environmental crises and solutions, ethnic and cultural identity—including those of minority status or mixed-group identity, and global matters of conflict resolution, justice and equality.

Description: Courses and experiences in the global community will introduce students to values, perspectives, beliefs, behaviors and customs of cultures different from their own. Students will examine the place of the U.S. within the global community. Emphasis should be placed on the interdependence of nations, and even individuals, across the globe to encourage students to be informed and responsible global citizens.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- examine their own cultures using a comparative global context;
- exhibit an understanding of global issues, trends, processes and systems; and
- think critically about issues such as identity, race, ethnicity, globalization, multiculturalism, difference, prejudice and discrimination within a global context.

Human Diversity in the U.S.

Rationale: Students must be prepared to live and work in U.S. society—which is diverse and heterogeneous. Each person has distinctive characteristics, capabilities, perspectives and experiences. On the other hand, humans are social beings; we develop relationships and live in community with each other. Within the diverse and pluralistic U.S. society, through interactions with each other, individuals often categorize people in terms of inclusion in or exclusion from particular groups. To reduce false or unsubstantiated opinions or assumptions they have of "others" and of themselves, students must examine the many patterns that characterize human groupings in U.S. culture—for example, those based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, (dis)ability, and socioeconomic class.

Description: Human diversity and interconnectedness in the U.S. includes developing an awareness of oneself and others within U.S. culture through scholarly study, research, and personal interaction. Courses and experiences in human diversity in the U.S. should expose students to multiple perspectives about U.S. society and how group affiliation affects people's perceptions and experiences.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- identify and discuss diverse perspectives and experiences as they examine U.S. institutions, practices and influences, from a contemporary and/or historical perspective;
- exhibit knowledge and understanding of a variety of cultures in the U.S., including majority and non-majority groups, and their interconnectedness within U.S. society; and
- think critically about issues such as identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, multiculturalism, difference, prejudice and discrimination within a U.S. social and cultural context.

Individuals within Social Systems

Rationale: In contemporary society we often encounter experiences and situations that make us wonder what influences individuals to behave in particular ways. For example, why do some people resolve conflicts using violence while others employ nonviolent strategies? What motivates some employees to exceed expectations while others do not demonstrate even a minimal level of commitment? Educated individuals can identify the difference between rigorous, systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena. The reciprocal relationships between human behavior and social environments must be examined in order to responsibly encourage behaviors that will maintain and/or achieve health and well-being for individuals, families, groups, societies, nations and the global community.

Description: Courses and experiences examining individuals within social systems emphasize how individuals, families, groups, institutions, and societies behave and influence one another and the natural environment. Students must be exposed to appropriate methods used to analyze and understand interactions of the various social factors that influence behavior at multiple levels: individual, familial, cultural, societal, national, and/or global.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- explore ways in which individuals, groups, institutions and/or societies behave and influence one another;
- exhibit an understanding of influences of the various social factors on behavior at multiple levels (individual, familial, cultural, societal, national, and/or global); and
- identify and describe appropriate systematic and scientific strategies to examine current social issues and problems.

The Natural and Physical World

Rationale: Scientific advances affect all our lives in powerful ways, from the development of medical advances that extend the quality and length of human life to the creation of new energy sources that reduce pollution and carbon emissions. Students should understand that views of the natural and physical world change with developments in science and experimental technologies. Students must learn the current understanding of the natural and physical world and intelligently consider competing explanations. An undergraduate education should offer opportunities for students to examine the relationship of science to society, to historical developments, to our understanding of truth, to ethical dilemmas, to creativity and innovation, and to broader understandings of the meaning of life and the cosmos.

Description: The educated person has an appreciation for and a broad understanding of the natural and physical world in which we all live. In courses and experiences that examine the natural and physical world students learn the central facts, ideas and theories related to the study of living systems and the physical universe and develop the ability to evaluate the merit of scientific and technological claims, using an understanding of the scientific method.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- understand and describe major concepts and facts related to the study of living systems and the physical universe;
- apply scientific facts and ideas to real-world problems; and
- develop a beginning understanding of social, practical, and moral significance of scientific knowledge and theory.

The Past and the Future

Rationale: The educated person realizes that the world in which we live is never the same from one day to the next, and that what we do in our personal and professional roles contributes to the knowledge and events of the future. Being able to trace current knowledge to its sources provides insight into what we know and how we came to know it. A sense of history enables us to use the lessons of the past as touchstones against which we compare our accomplishments. Appreciating that knowledge is constantly evolving means that people can prepare for the future, develop contingencies, be alert to trends, understand their origins, and acquire the skills and resources required to redirect or modify those trends rather than merely stand aside and be at their mercy.

Description: Learning that what we know now is the result of the trials and errors that came before allows students to begin to understand that knowledge is provisional and constantly evolving. Courses and experiences in the past and the future area help students realize the need to understand the past and thoughtfully consider the future to contextualize current knowledge, to glimpse how it may continue to develop, and to estimate what role they might play in that development.

Courses and experiences in this area facilitate students learning to:

- understand how past events and actions have influenced or effected current societies and events;
- develop and articulate educated guesses as to how individuals, events, or theories in the present may affect the future; and
- understand that knowledge is not fixed and that human beings influence future events and ways of knowing.

2.2 General Education Goals: Proficiency in Communication and Critical Thinking

According to AAC&U guidelines on "The Essential Learning Outcomes," these two intellectual and practical skills ought to be "practiced extensively, across the curriculum." This Task Force concurs, and thus ***we recommend that communication and critical thinking be taught, fostered, and repeatedly practiced in courses throughout the undergraduate curriculum, including courses taken as part of students' general education.***

Communication

Communication is how individuals exchange ideas or feelings through a common system of sounds, symbols, signs or behaviors. Interpersonal behavior is the process of sending *and* receiving information: speaking and listening, writing and reading, signing and seeing. The college-educated person will recognize that how he or she communicates and interprets others' communication necessarily varies according to context, interlocutor, audience, and medium. Scholars in psychology may communicate research studies via articles published in specific journals, a marketer may develop an ad campaign around an eye-catching graphic, and an engineer may effectively illustrate concerns regarding a proposed bridge using structural plans.

Effective communication helps maintain a sense of community and provides a means for crafting, if not consensus, then understanding, in a diverse and complex world. Students who learn multiple, effective modes of communication will strengthen the substance of their message by selecting the appropriate manner to communicate it. They will gain a more complete understanding of the communications they receive by recognizing the conventions used by the transmitter.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking occurs when a person probes beyond what is evident on the surface to evaluate the information provided. A college-educated person knows that greater understanding can be found by identifying a purpose, raising relevant questions, seeking information, making inferences, applying concepts, making assumptions, generating implications and developing conclusions. The process of critical thinking varies across situations, fields and bodies of knowledge: a student may learn one set of critical thinking methods in a grain science laboratory, another in the library, and yet others in theatrical productions or a field experience in Costa Rica. While the methods may differ, college-educated people will recognize that they are capable of inquiry to answer simple and complex questions.

Critical thinking does not ensure that we will find "truth" or reach the "right" answer. Critical thinking helps provide people with the ability to question various perspectives, opinions, and stated truths and to arrive at their own informed answers, either from evaluating existing information or through the research process that critical thinking naturally initiates.

2.3 The University Undergraduate SLOs and General Education

The eight essential areas of general education and the proficiencies in communication and critical thinking are recommended with the five Kansas State University undergraduate student learning outcomes in mind.

All eight content areas deal explicitly with the *knowledge* SLO, with an emphasis on building a broad foundation of knowledge—a process that all K-State students should have well underway when they complete an undergraduate degree.

We affirm the *communication* and *critical thinking* SLOs as essential learning outcomes that should be prominently addressed throughout every student's undergraduate curriculum—in the major and in general education electives.

We explicitly address the *diversity* and *integrity* SLOs in the content areas of Ethical Reasoning and Social Responsibility, The Global Community, and Human Diversity in the U.S.

All five of the following SLO statements are purposeful intentions of the undergraduate educational experience at Kansas State University. Part of the Knowledge outcome focuses on learning in the student's chosen major. The remaining outcomes are related to both general education and study in the major.

K-State Undergraduates will:	
Knowledge [Major only]	demonstrate a depth of knowledge and apply the methods of inquiry in the discipline of their choosing.
Knowledge [Gen Ed/Major]	demonstrate the foundation for a breadth of knowledge across their choice of varied disciplines – <i>gather, integrate, and appropriately apply their learning from many different sources and from many different fields of inquiry.</i> (Carol Geary Schneider, AAC&U)
Critical Thinking [Gen Ed/Major]	demonstrate the ability to access and interpret information, respond and adapt to changing situation, make complex decisions, solve problems, and evaluate actions.
Communication [Gen Ed/Major]	communicate clearly and effectively.
Diversity [Gen Ed/Major]	demonstrate awareness and understanding of the skills necessary to live and work in a diverse world.
Integrity [Gen Ed/Major]	demonstrate <i>emerging skills to assess and evaluate</i> ethical dilemmas within the ethical standards of their academic discipline and/or profession.

3. Assessing General Education: Student Learning Outcomes

K-State must develop an assessment program for general education. The Task Force recommends a program focused on the University undergraduate student learning outcomes (see table on previous page).

As was the case when we began assessment of student learning activities at K-State in degree programs, we will begin with a subset of these student learning outcomes and work from there.

A recent relevant development is that K-State will be participating in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), an effort by NASULGC (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges) and AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities) to answer calls for accountability from the U.S. Department of Education, legislators, governing boards, and other stakeholders. For more information about VSA and to see the reporting template, click [here](#).

For the VSA, a standardized test will be used to measure student performance. The Office of Assessment is in the process of evaluating the University's choices and is leaning toward recommending the CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency), which has test modules in science, math, reading, writing, and critical thinking. The CAAP is a product of the organization that also produces the ACT. They propose a scheme by which entering ACT scores are used as the pre-test and then senior module scores as the post-test. Although we are only required to report critical thinking and writing scores for the VSA, the addition of the reading module would help us to measure the communication and critical thinking outcomes. For more information about the CAAP, including detailed descriptions of each of the modules, click [here](#).

For the SLOs not covered by CAAP modules, we envision interdisciplinary teams that will work to design assessment strategies to be implemented over the next few years within an overall assessment plan for general education outcomes. These teams will involve the entire University community. For instance, for the University SLO that addresses diversity, reflected in the content areas of *Human Diversity in the U.S.* and *Global Community*, the Office for Diversity and the Office of International Programs will join faculty and student service professionals in the assessment planning process.

General education outcomes could be assessed within capstone courses in degree programs. Ideally, each degree program would have a final, culminating capstone experience, tailored to its curriculum and discipline or profession. A capstone experience might be offered in the form of a course, a project within a course, or an independent study. It might be concurrent with an internship or a project conducted outside the classroom. One focus of a capstone is to challenge students to demonstrate the ability to “gather, integrate, and appropriately apply” their learning from general education with learning from their major. At this point, not all majors offer a common capstone course for every graduating senior, so that the assessment process will have to be flexible to accommodate the needs and resources of different departments and colleges.

Section 3: Recommendations for Implementation

1. The Process

The Task Force recommends that the general education reform process at Kansas State University be coordinated at three levels – university, college, and department – to integrate general education into the degree programs in ways that best serve students.

There are many practicalities to consider when implementing a general education program at Kansas State University. Successful implementation of a new program will require cooperation and coordination among faculty, advisors, student leaders, and administration at three levels – department, college and university.

Connecting “general education” and “education in the majors”

The AAC&U recommends that "liberal education outcomes ... reach their highest level of cultivation in the context of the student's area of specialization or major field(s)" (*Our Student's Best Work*). One of the emerging trends in higher education appears to be a move toward understanding how general education and the major connect to and complement each other, how significant and specific types of general education happen within the major, and how connections within and across disciplines are essential to learning in all majors (Gaff, Schneider).

Indeed, the Higher Learning Commission, academic programs at K-State, their accrediting bodies, and the organizations that employ college graduates seem to agree that a broad education including work across the sciences, social sciences, mathematics, humanities, and arts plays an essential role in preparing students for the challenges of a diverse, globally-interdependent (or "flat"), and "knowledge-fueled" world. As one commentator put it, clients do not want to hire students who are "locked into a single frame of reference" (Schneider).

Even though most faculty and many students at the University seem to acknowledge, at least on a theoretical level, the necessary and interconnected roles of general education and the major, there may be nevertheless a continuing perception that what we call general education is somehow "opposed to" or "less essential than" the education that happens in the major. For a robust and exciting general education program to succeed at K-State, this sense of conflict needs to be transformed into a more constructive understanding of how the two complement each other and how they are, in fact, necessary to and inseparable from one another.

In some instances, colleges and departments might acknowledge the ways in which their upper-level courses for majors include significant, higher-level general education objectives and outcomes. Colleges and departments might also identify with clarity and specificity the areas of general education they feel their students are most often missing in their current programs of study.

By identifying both the strengths and weaknesses in the current general education of students on a degree-program by degree-program basis, colleges and departments will be better equipped to help shape and guide the general education reform process at K-State. And we will all be better prepared to advise students and to help them see how and why all of their coursework connects and matters.

Planning a smooth transition from UGE to the new program of general education

Regardless of when a new general education program is to be implemented, we will have to plan to accommodate students in both the new program and the UGE program for 3-4 years. Students who began their programs of study at Kansas State University before the implementation of the new program will be allowed to complete their degrees with UGE requirements.

We suggest an implementation policy that requires students who begin their study at Kansas State University on or after a designated date (such as the beginning of Fall 2009) will be obligated to meet the requirements of the new general education program. Appropriate accommodations will be made for all other students.

Meeting the general education requirements in the eight content areas

Students and faculty will review and plan programs of study to include exposure to a breadth of learning, with at least one three-credit hour course (or some equivalent) in each of the eight content areas. The student will designate one of the eight content areas when enrolling in a course to meet their general education requirements. A single course may not be used to cover more than one content area.

At least six of the areas must be covered with courses outside the student's major. Changing majors may affect which content areas are outside the student's major. However, that may not necessarily mean the student will have to enroll in any more credits than originally planned.

Courses in the eight areas cannot substitute for the credit hours in the Common Degree Requirements: Expository Writing (six credit hours) and Public Speaking (two credits).

Thus, in terms of credit hours, all K-State undergraduates will take at least 24 hours to cover the eight content areas. Six of these hours may count toward a student's major (for example, a three-credit-hour capstone course and one other three-credit course in the major), but at least 18 of these hours will be taken outside the major.

Accommodating transfer credit

Students will be required to cover at least four of the content areas with K-State courses.

Accommodating transfer credits should not be difficult in the new program of general education since a significant focus is on eight content areas. When there is already an articulation agreement, we suggest relying on that to determine what content area(s) a transfer credit could cover. [The Task Force is still considering what to do for transfer credits not covered by an articulation agreement.]

It will be helpful to develop a mechanism for tracking and documenting which transfer courses are accepted for which content areas to ensure that these decisions are made systematically and uniformly across departments, and that no transfer course could be used for a myriad of different content areas for different students.

Tagging courses for the eight content areas

Students and advisors will need to know which courses can be used to cover which content areas. Tagging a course – designating content area(s) for each course – is to be the responsibility of the department offering the course. We recommend that an electronic process be developed to facilitate the tagging.

A single course may be tagged for no more than two content areas. We suggest that the designated content area(s) should be a significant focus of the course – at least 30%.

We suggest that all undergraduate courses be tagged. Certainly it is not the case that all courses will be available to meet general education requirements, but it will be the case that students can use courses in the major to cover two of the content areas.

In any instance where it seems impossible to designate a content area for a course – and we know those cases do exist – departments will “tag” the course as NT.

We do not anticipate that tagging all courses will be a burden to departments. Besides, it might be beneficial to conduct a study to see how much breadth is actually represented in our programs of study at Kansas State University.

Other course designations should preclude some or many students from taking certain courses. A course may be designated for majors only. Established prerequisites may mean that non-majors cannot take a course. Enrollment may be capped to avoid a sudden or unwanted increase in the number of students enrolling in a course.

These tags or designations will be reviewed by the administrator responsible for general education. If there are questions about designated tags, the administrator may talk with the department about their selection rationale. It would also be important for the administrator to review the course tags on a regular basis to get a sense of whether students might find it difficult to cover any of the content areas with courses available during a given time period.

Using a search capability in the new iSIS to help students select courses for general education

Students and advisors really do need a simple, straightforward search process through which to identify which courses being offered during a given semester can be used to cover which content areas for general education. It is our understanding that the new iSIS (Student Information System) has that capability. That capability will not be available in the Fall 2008 launch of iSIS, but could be developed to be used for summer enrollment for Fall 2009. We strongly recommend that be done.

Updating materials, websites, brochures, etc. to reflect the new program of general education

Departments and student service units must take the responsibility to update whatever materials are used with students to help them understand both the requirements of general education at Kansas State University as well as the learning opportunities those requirements offer.

2. Leadership

We recommend that the university create a position in central administration, someone who would lead and administer several common university undergraduate programs such as general education, a first-year experience, the Honors Program, and so on.

The reforms discussed in Section 2 will require significant coordination, leadership, training, and vision. Someone must be in charge, someone who is not already overwhelmed with university responsibilities. Thus it would not be wise to give the direct oversight of the program to any already-busy administrator, or to a full-time faculty member who would simply be the head of an oversight committee, or simply to staff.

Instead, we imagine that the leadership needed for such a program would have to come from a member of the faculty for whom the care and enhancement of the program would be a primary responsibility.

We recommend that resources be provided to fund the administrator position and to support and house the office of an administrator to oversee general education programs.

The administrative position and support staff will need to be filled. Office spaces must be found and the office established for a functioning program to work.

3. Teaching Loads and Resources

We recommend that Kansas State University ensure that departments are provided with the resources to support general education.

Teaching general education has to be acknowledged as and rewarded as a valued activity. It must be part of the participating faculty members' usual course loads. The teaching of general education courses must never be assigned on an overload basis.

4. Other Considerations

The following items are also crucial factors that must be addressed prior to and during the implementation of the program.

- Students must have a sense of ownership of their education, so that they do not see it as something they receive from the university, but something they actively learn and use throughout their lives.
- The entire K-State community of faculty, administrators and staff must be educated about the goals and objectives of the new general education program to understand how it differs from the current UGE program; how many existing courses in their academic programs fit (or could fit); and how the new program might positively affect student learning and retention.
- The general education program must encourage ownership from all colleges and academic departments. Historically, the College of Arts and Sciences has been perceived as "owning" general education. However, K-State's College of Arts and Sciences expresses no desire to

be the sole owner of general education. In the same respect, other K-State colleges express a desire to be full partners in general education, both to ensure that their students receive a truly broad general education and because they see a value their courses could have for students from other colleges.

- Coordination with community colleges and other institutions must be seamless so that transfer students are not burdened with two sets of general education requirements. Acceptance of transfer credits as a part of the student's individual general education plan is essential.
- Finally, in a more specific and detailed way, the University needs to consider how to include co-curricular activities into the general education plan—activities such as community engagement, study abroad, internships, and other similar educational pursuits.