

A REVISED PROPOSAL
THE K-STATE 8: GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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The 2007-2008 General Education Task Force submits this proposal for Faculty Senate consideration – that Kansas State University adopt a new system of general education to ensure that every student begins to develop “*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).

The K-State 8: General Education Program encourages students to be intellectual explorers and assists students in developing a diverse set of *beginning literacies* to reflect a breadth of general knowledge. This broad exposure is designed to awaken and ignite students' interest in varying disciplines, while also teaching knowledge and skills expected of college-educated individuals.

Within the K-State 8, students and advisors will plan programs of study to promote exposure to a breadth of learning that includes the eight areas below. The emphasis and the amount of study in each area will undoubtedly vary for each student, depending upon his/her choice of major and other interests. Nevertheless, each student's program of study must demonstrate an exploration of all eight (8) areas. (See Appendix for a detailed description of each area.)

The K-State 8 Areas:

- ❑ Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding
- ❑ Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning
- ❑ Ethical Reasoning and Responsibility
- ❑ Global [Issues and Perspectives](#)
- ❑ Historical Perspectives
- ❑ Human Diversity within the U.S.
- ❑ Natural and Physical Sciences
- ❑ Social Sciences

In addition to the emphasis on a breadth of knowledge, this proposal acknowledges the importance of the skills of communication and critical thinking. Developing proficiencies in these intellectual skills is not, nor should it be, exclusive to any program of general education. We recognize that all undergraduate courses – including those within the major fields – 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 enhance their abilities in these skill areas.

Implementation

Successful implementation of a new general education program at Kansas State University will require cooperation and coordination among faculty members, advisors, students, and administrators at all levels – department, college and university. There are many practicalities to consider.

Tagging Courses

Credit-bearing courses and experiences will be clearly tagged for each K-State 8 area in order for students and advisors to create students' programs of study.

The Task Force recommends including credit-bearing experiences as a way to meet K-State 8 requirements. We cannot provide an all-inclusive list, but examples might be study abroad, an internship, leadership in a major university activity, a research project in collaboration with a faculty member, capstone experiences, etc. Like courses, such experiences would have to be credit bearing.

Tagging a course/experience – designating the appropriate K-State 8 area(s) – will be the responsibility of the program or department teaching it. A single course/experience may be tagged for up to two (2) K-State 8 areas.

To facilitate the selection of courses by students and advisors, the program or department responsible for the course/experience will indicate if it is open to:

- a) only majors,
- b) only non-majors, or
- c) all students.

The programs/departments should use the following decision matrix and the area descriptions in the Appendix when tagging courses/experiences for the K-State 8. The Task Force suggests that all undergraduate courses and experiences that meet the criteria should be tagged.

DECISION MATRIX: TAGGING COURSES/EXPERIENCES

Criteria for Tagging Courses/Experiences	NO – action	YES – action
1. Do the principal student learning outcomes* of the course/experience focus on one or two of the K-State 8 areas?	NO – do not tag	YES – tag with one (1) or two (2) K-State 8 areas. Go to step #2
2. Is the course/experience appropriate for non-majors?	NO – designate for majors only	YES – designate for non-majors or for both majors and non-majors

*A principal student learning outcome (SLO) is a substantial outcome that is essential in the students' work in the course/experience and for which the teacher implements significant strategies – methods already used by the teacher – to evaluate student learning in the area.

Course Requirement Guidelines

Each student must successfully complete credit-bearing courses/experiences to cover all of the K-State 8 areas. Some of the K-State 8 areas may be covered in the student's major. The intent of the K-State 8 is for students to explore the perspectives of disciplines that may be quite different from those of their own majors. For that reason, a minimum of four different course prefixes (e.g., AGEC, MATH, FSHS) must be represented in the fulfillment of the K-State 8 requirements. The Task Force strongly recommends that students be advised to enroll in a sufficient variety of courses and experiences to offer them a genuine breadth of perspective.

When a course is tagged for two K-State 8 areas, a student may count that course toward both areas. However – to repeat – the Task Force strongly recommends that students be advised to enroll in a sufficient variety of courses and experiences to offer them a genuine breadth of perspective.

Changing Majors, Adding/Removing Minors or Changing Programs of Study

When students change majors, the change will not affect fulfillment of their general education requirements.

Transfer credits

Transfer students will be required to cover all eight (8) of the K-State 8 areas.

When Kansas State University has an articulation agreement with a transfer institution, we suggest relying on that agreement to determine which K-State 8 area(s) transfer credit(s) could cover. For example, when a K-State course is tagged for one or two areas, then the “equivalent” course from another institution would be tagged for the same one or two areas. When there is not an articulation agreement with the transfer institution, the student’s dean’s office, in consultation with [leadership](#) overseeing general education, will determine which area(s) transfer credit(s) could cover.

[It will be essential](#) to develop a mechanism for tracking and documenting which transfer courses are accepted for which K-State 8 areas across the university. It is imperative to ensure that these decisions are made systematically and uniformly across programs/departments, and this information should be made available on a website for students and advisors at K-State and at transfer institutions.

Overlap of K-State 8 and UGE General Education Programs

Regardless of when a new general education program is implemented, we must accommodate students in both the new K-State 8 program and the current UGE program for about 3-4 years. Students who began their programs of study at Kansas State University under the UGE system may complete their degrees with UGE requirements or may choose to move to the K-State 8 program. An implementation policy must state that students who begin their study at Kansas State University on or after a designated date will meet the requirements of the K-State 8 program.

Leadership

[Decisions about the leadership of the General Education program will rest with the Provost.](#)

However, we recommend that the university designate an administrative position to lead and administer general education. Responsibilities should include: oversight of the course/experience tagging process and outcome, availability of courses/experiences within all K-State 8 areas, assessment of student learning, evaluation of the K-State 8 program, application of transfer credits for K-State 8, etc.

[We do point out that the governance structure currently in place for UGE provides a useful model, and that continuing that structure would probably facilitate the transition from UGE to the K-State 8. Faculty and administrative involvement in a shared governance system has served](#)

us well with UGE. The provost could continue to designate someone already on his staff to provide overall leadership and coordination. A group representing the undergraduate colleges (similar to UGE's ICCP) could coordinate tagging, tracking transfer courses, availability of courses in each area, etc. A committee of faculty members (similar to the UGE Council) could be charged to lead the development of effective assessment for general education.

Assessment

External Expectations Regarding Assessment of General Education Outcomes

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and other accreditors and stakeholders want to know what evidence K-State is gathering to show that our students have achieved the broad outcomes we consider common for all undergraduates. K-State has expressed those broad outcomes in our five common undergraduate SLOs about knowledge, communication, critical thinking, diversity, and integrity.

Furthermore, the fundamental goal of general education outcomes assessment is to ascertain what a student knows and is able to do with that knowledge upon graduation. In other words, we want to assess the extent to which a student is able to *integrate and apply* what was learned in major courses, general education courses, and electives (as well as from co-curricular experiences).

Institutions often capture this information in a project, paper, or product that is required within a major course, such as a capstone. Other ways to gather such evidence would be from certain key courses related to specific outcomes, standardized tests in broad areas (like writing or critical thinking), collecting and scoring samples of student work from outcome-specific projects, and indirect measures such as student self-report of knowledge, attitudes, or behavior.

The K-State 8 areas in this proposal for a new general education program are not in themselves statements of learning outcomes. Rather, they form the framework for exposure and study that faculty members feel are necessary for students to be educated people. The K-State 8 areas are considered to contribute most directly to the knowledge SLO (critical basic knowledge); however, several of them also relate to the other undergraduate outcomes.

Current Assessment Activities at K-State Related to the Undergraduate SLOs and General Education

Several assessment projects, already being implemented and discussed at K-State, relate to assessment of the common undergraduate SLOs and, therefore, relate to general education outcomes:

1. The Diversity Writing project in the English Department requires all students in Expository Writing I to read, discuss, and write about human diversity topics. This project has significant data about student learning, which clearly relates to the communication and diversity outcomes and to critical thinking as well.
2. The Office of Assessment initiated the use of "CAAP" tests in Fall 2008. CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency) is the standardized, nationally-normed assessment program that K-State is administering as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), a joint venture between NASULGC and AASCU. K-State is using the CAAP tests on critical

thinking, reading, and writing, which may assist in assessing the critical thinking and communication SLOs. If the university finds these data at all helpful, we could add modules on math and science eventually, even as a pilot over the next few years, working closely with representatives of math and science faculty.

3. The HLC Academy project at K-State focuses on teaching and assessing critical thinking through the collaboration of academic faculty and student affairs professionals. This group has been working for the past year. The model, if promising, could be expanded to other areas like ethical reasoning or diversity.
4. Another group was organized in November 2008 to think about helping faculty teach and assess ethical reasoning in various majors and courses. This project should eventually produce some helpful assessment data.
5. A committee working through the Office of Diversity is developing an instrument to assess student knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior related to the diversity SLO. Pilots of the instrument are underway.

An Additional Assessment Component Suggestion

The Task Force discussed the idea of capstone projects that would be scored by independent raters on communication, critical thinking (and possibly diversity and ethical reasoning). This kind of project would be gradually implemented, beginning with majors that currently have well-established required capstone courses or experiences.

Feasibility of Recommendations

We do need to do some "authentic" assessment of our students' best work, such as the kind that is done as a culminating project within their majors. This would require some resources of time and a bit of money (for instance, to pay faculty during the summer to score student work), and promises to result in some very useful information. There may be other ways to gather this kind of data; however, we recommend a pilot project that uses this strategy within the capstone course structure that already exists.

Based on our contact with HLC, we believe the activities described above in #1- #5 will be considered relevant by HLC and other outside accreditors. These projects currently underway at K-State have excellent potential to give us data that are both manageable and very useful (with the possible exception of the CAAP tests, because their value is still to be determined) for working toward improvements in student learning, which is the ultimate goal of assessment. Because these efforts have already begun, we believe that the use of these data for assessment of general education would be expedient and cost-effective.

Program Evaluation of the K-State 8 Program

In addition to the assessment of general education outcomes, there should be a regular and systematic program evaluation plan for the new K-State 8 proposal. This is separate from (but related to) assessment and carries the goal of determining the strengths and weaknesses within the program itself rather than focusing on student learning outcomes. This process should consist of monitoring courses that are tagged within each K-State 8 area (beginning with the first "tagging" process) and monitoring the ways students are actually meeting the K-State 8 requirements (which should be possible through iSIS and DARS).

Additional Note from Cia Verschelden, who currently has a one-year appointment to work with the Higher Learning Commission:

Because I understand that someone has asked about this, I'll address just briefly the "state of the art" of general education outcomes assessment at large, complex institutions like K-State. (Disclaimer: These are only my observations from my work with HLC over the past several years.)

Of course, many institutions like us currently, or soon will, administer one of the standardized tests required by the Voluntary System of Accountability. We chose the CAAP – the Collegian Assessment of Academic Proficiency, a product of ACT.

Outside of that, most places like K-State are at about the same place we are. KU does a process of interviews with a sample of seniors – similar to what we did 10 years ago. There are some schools where examples of writing are being collected from a sample of students and scored for institutional assessment. These projects are, I believe, in the early stages at most places. In my experience, if we were to implement the plan as suggested above and do it well, we would be succeeding in this area given the size and complexity of our institution.

Appendix: The K-State 8 Area Descriptions

Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding

Courses and experiences in aesthetic experience and interpretive understanding provide students with the opportunity to develop their interpretive skills and heighten their aesthetic responses to literature, the performing arts, and the visual arts. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- analyze, interpret, and respond to literary texts, artistic performances, and works of art by drawing on differing historical, cultural, or theoretical perspectives;
- develop critical thinking skills, including their ability to reflect on and explain the meanings of artistic works, performances, and texts; and
- understand how artistic works shape and reproduce social ideas, values, and concerns and how they interact with and influence society, history, and culture.

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. The study of artistic works can heighten curiosity, intensify aesthetic and observational capacities, and sharpen the 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.

Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning

Courses and experiences in empirical and quantitative reasoning provide students with 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. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

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

Rationale: All individuals are faced with the inevitable task of evaluating available information in order to make decisions. These decisions range from choices that are personal (e.g., whether or not to undergo particular medical treatments) to those that affect the community or society (e.g., evaluating 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.

Ethical Reasoning and Responsibility

Courses and experiences in ethical reasoning and responsibility should assist students in learning how to think through ethical dilemmas and make sound decisions when facing real-life situations. Ethical reasoning requires the study of 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. Ethical responsibility includes the ability to apply ethical standards to social and environmental issues. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

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

Rationale: Students must be exposed to a variety of ethical perspectives and multiple ways of resolving ethical dilemmas in order to be responsible citizens. Because humans exist within social groups and live within the natural and built environment, ethical decisions must include consideration of others and their surroundings. Therefore, social and environmental engagement and responsibility is the context in which ethical reasoning occurs. Educated citizens should be able to discern and reflect upon the broader impact of their individual actions.

Global Issues and Perspectives

Courses and experiences in global [issues and perspectives](#) will introduce students to values, perspectives, beliefs, behaviors, policies and customs from around the world. Emphasis should be placed on exploring the interdependence of people, nations and systems across the globe. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- examine their own cultural context using a comparative global perspective;
- exhibit an understanding of global issues, trends, policies, processes, impacts and systems; and
- think critically about issues such as globalization, sustainability, multiculturalism, political and governmental context, privilege, difference/similarity, prejudice and discrimination within a global context.

Rationale: A global perspective is imperative for K-State graduates who will continue to live and work within a global community throughout their lives. Current global challenges are of great importance and affect all individuals, political systems and nations, regardless of minority/majority status or group identity. Current challenges include: economic globalization, sustainability, global health priorities, environmental crises, ethnic and cultural identity and global matters of conflict resolution, justice and equity.

Historical Perspectives

Courses and experiences examining historical perspectives 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 examine the role they might play. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- Understand how past events and actions have influenced or affected current events, scholarly knowledge, and societies;
- Understand that knowledge is not fixed and that human beings continue to reinterpret the past based on current perspectives; and
- Identify and describe appropriate systematic and scientific strategies to examine history.

Rationale: Educated individuals realize that the world in which we live changes. 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 as needed.

Human Diversity within the U.S.

Courses and experiences in human diversity within the U.S. should assist students in developing an awareness of self and others through scholarly study, research and personal interaction. Students should be exposed to multiple perspectives about U.S. society and how group affiliation affects people's perceptions and experiences. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- identify and discuss diverse perspectives and experiences as they examine U.S. institutions, practices, policies and influences from contemporary and/or historical viewpoints;
- 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, similarity/difference, prejudice and discrimination within a U.S. social and cultural context.

Rationale: Within the diverse and pluralistic U.S. society, through interactions with each other, individuals often categorize people in terms of inclusion 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.

Natural and Physical Sciences

Courses and experiences in natural and physical sciences introduce students to the central facts, ideas and theories related to the study of living systems and the physical universe and help them develop the ability to evaluate the merit of scientific and technological claims. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- understand 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 ethical significance of scientific knowledge and theory as well as their applications through technology.

Rationale: Scientific advances affect 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. Students must learn our current understanding of the natural and physical sciences. Students also should understand that views of the natural and physical world change with developments in science and experimental technologies. An undergraduate education should ask that students examine the relationship of science to society, to historical developments, to our understanding of truth, to ethical dilemmas, to creativity and innovation, to broad implications and sustainability and to understandings of the meaning of life and the cosmos.

Social Sciences

Courses and experiences in social sciences emphasize how individuals, families, groups, institutions, governments and societies behave and influence one another and the natural environment. Students are exposed to appropriate methods used to analyze and understand interactions of various social factors that influence behavior at these multiple levels. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- explore ways in which individuals, groups, institutions, governments and/or societies behave and influence one another;
- exhibit an understanding of the various social factors that influence behavior at multiple levels of human interaction; and
- identify and describe appropriate systematic and scientific strategies to examine current social issues and problems.

Rationale: 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.