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November 30, 2004

Duane Nellis, Provost
Kansas State University
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CAMPUS

Dear Provost Nellis:

Please find attached the report of the General Education Steering Committee, appointed about a year ago by Provost James Coffman and Faculty Senate President Robert Zabel.

The committee's charge was to obtain ideas and proposals from across the campus about the future of general education at K-State. We were also charged with providing you a list and brief descriptions of possible future schemes for general education here. As we report to you, we are cognizant of the fact that the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association requires that a university's "undergraduate degree programs include a coherent general education requirement consistent with the institution's mission and designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry."

The attached materials are, then, the fruits of our labor. These include a description of our activities as a committee; summaries of faculty and student surveys; several specific proposals that we received and discussed; and a summary of several possible schemes for general education. (For detailed results from the two surveys, see the committee's website (<http://www.ksu.edu/catl/GenEd/>.)

We held what we felt was a rather successful open forum last April (notes from which are on our website) and have opted to not hold another open forum this semester. If you would like to see another open forum held, our suggestion would be that it combine a look backwards to what we have found in our work as well as a preview of what is to come in the work of our successor committee.


Before closing, I would like to mention the inevitable connection between the ongoing work on general education and the university's increased emphasis on the assessment of student learning. Clearly, general education, in whatever way we implement or deliver it, will need to be formally assessed. Several of the university-wide student learning

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outcomes, as adopted by Faculty Senate, mesh nicely with general education and could be among the items assessed. Our successor committee, then, might well want to think about assessment of general education from the outset of its work. That is, the scheme for general education and the methods for assessment of that scheme should perhaps be developed side by side.

It goes without saying that the committee would be happy to meet with you to discuss our report.

Sincerely yours,



Gerald Reeck
Professor
Chair of General Education Steering Committee

cc: Jackie Spears, Faculty Senate President

Report of the General Education Steering Committee
Kansas State University
Submitted to Provost Nellis and Faculty Senate President Spears
December 13, 2004

Committee Members

Gerald Reeck, Chair	Arts and Sciences
Victoria Clegg	Provost Staff
Mickey Ransom	Agriculture
Carolyn Thompson	Architecture, Planning and Design
Bruce Glymour	Arts and Sciences
David Stone	Arts and Sciences
Bill Turnley	Business Administration
Mary Kay Zabel	Education
Mike Harnett	Engineering
Deborah Meyer	Human Ecology
David Ahlvers	Technology and Aviation
Sara Kearns	Hale Library
Betty Stevens	Division of Continuing Education
Juanita McGowan	Provost Staff, Arts and Sciences
Patricia Marsh	Assessment and Program Review
Ryan Rehmeier	Graduate Student Representative
Stephanie Biggs	Undergraduate Student Representative
Mary Geiger	Undergraduate Student Representative
Blair Reynolds	Undergraduate Student Representative
Maggie Trambly	Undergraduate Student Representative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Report of Steering Committee Activities	Page 1
Summary of Faculty and Student Surveys	Page 3
Summary of Student Focus Group	Page 7
Possible Schemes for General Education at Kansas State University	Page 8
Appendix	Page 10

**General Education Steering Committee
Report of Activities: November 2003 - November 2004**

The *Steering Committee to Consider General Education's Future at K-State* met for the first time approximately one year ago on November 24th, 2003 to introduce members to each other and to have an informal discussion of the Steering Committee's task. The Steering Committee membership (see Appendix 1) was comprised of faculty, staff and students, representing the eight Undergraduate Colleges, the Division of Continuing Education, Hale Library, and the Office of the Provost.

The Steering Committee conducted work in twelve general meetings, online discussions, and several meetings with others. A brief overview of the year's activities is presented in the chart below.

DATE	STEERING COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES
11-24-03	General Meeting: Introductory
12-08-03	General Meeting: Charge from Provost and Faculty Senate President
01-30-04	General Meeting
02-12-04	Article in <i>Collegian</i> (Reeck interviewed)
02-13/04	General Meeting
02-27-04	General Meeting
03-09-04	Presentation to Academic Affairs Committee of Faculty Senate
03-12-04	General Meeting
04-02-04	General Meeting
04-26-04	Chair's E-mail Message to University Community
04-27-04	General Education Open Forum, 212 K-State Student Union
04-30-04	General Meeting
05-03-04	General Education Steering Committee website launched
05-05-04	Chair's E-mail Message to University Community
05-29-04	Interim report submitted to Provost(s) & Faculty Senate President
07-09-04	Survey Subcommittee Meeting
07-21-04	Survey Subcommittee Meeting
08-11-04	Update for Provost Nellis
08-17-04	General Meeting
08-30-04	Faculty Survey launched
09-17-04	General Meeting
10-04-04	Report to Council of Deans
10-08-04	General Meeting
10-14-04	Student Survey launched
11-09-04	Student Focus Group conducted
11-12-04	General Meeting

At the second general meeting, Provost Coffman and Faculty Senate President Zabel charged the Steering Committee to develop and implement procedures for a campus-wide solicitation of ideas and proposals, and to promote and support a creative discussion that would involve the university community. Provost Coffman also reviewed imperatives for General Education at K-State: relevance of student learning outcomes, application of the General Education program across all majors, fiscal feasibility, and political viability of the program. In

ensuing meetings the Steering Committee developed several initiatives to gather information from K-State faculty and students.

An Open Forum was held on April 27, 2004. Approximately forty people attended, in addition to panelists and members of the Steering Committee. The Chair of the General Education Steering Committee opened the forum by emphasizing that the Steering Committee hoped to obtain insights from the campus community. He then introduced five panelists, who had been invited to share some ideas as a means of initiating the open discussion.

This forum discussion led the Steering Committee to survey K-State faculty and unclassified professionals on their views of general education. A survey subcommittee (Biggs, Clegg, Marsh, Reeck, Rehmeier, and Stevens) met during the summer of 2004 to design the electronic survey that was reviewed by the Steering Committee and launched on August 30 to approximately 1,800 unclassified employees. A threaded discussion board was established and announced when the survey was launched, but no one has entered comments.

Student perspectives also were solicited through an electronic survey, launched on October 14 to a stratified random sample of 4,000 K-State undergraduates. A small follow-up focus group was conducted on November 9.

Information about the work of the Steering Committee as well as initial data results gathered through the surveys was disseminated through presentations to Academic Affairs of Faculty Senate, the Student Senate, and the Council of Deans. The General Education Steering Committee website (www.ksu.edu/catl/GenEd) was established in May 2004 to post information about the committee, the results from both surveys, and a summary of the focus group.

In addition to its charge, the Steering Committee reviewed and discussed proposals offered independently by two faculty members and by informal groups from two colleges. While the Steering Committee makes no comment regarding these proposals, they are being forwarded to Provost Nellis with the recommendation to make them available to the next committee or task force.

Summary of Faculty and Student Surveys about General Education November 29, 2004

The following summary of the two surveys is descriptive, with only very preliminary analyses reported. Much remains to be done with the data to determine any trends or perspectives that might influence future decisions about general education at Kansas State University. The results of the two surveys are reported in tandem in the initial sections so that comparisons can be more easily seen.

Survey Population Descriptions

The first survey was sent to approximately 1800 faculty and unclassified professionals. A total of 556 people responded, a response rate of about 31%. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the respondents were affiliated with an academic college; the remaining thirteen percent (13%) were affiliated with the Library, Extension, the Division of Continuing Education, or Central Administration. The vast majority of respondents appear to be faculty members. For that reason and for the sake of convenience, we will use the term “faculty” when referring to this survey.

The second survey was sent to a stratified random sample of 4,000 students. A total of 1,150 undergraduates completed the survey, which is a response rate of approximately 29%. Respondents were evenly distributed across the four classes (Freshmen – 24%; Sophomores – 25%, Juniors – 27%, Seniors – 24%) and represented all eight undergraduate colleges.

Preferences for a Definition of General Education

Faculty showed a clear preference for the “breadth” definition of general education. About one-third selected the “student learning outcomes” definition. Less than 10% opted for the “basic skills” definition. Students revealed a somewhat stronger preference for the “breadth” definition. Nearly two-thirds of the student respondents selected that definition, with a fairly even distribution across the other two options.

Which of the following definitions of general education do you prefer?	<u>Faculty</u>	<u>Student</u>
GE provides for a student's exposure to a broad range of ideas, knowledge, and ways of thinking by requiring all degree-bound students to complete courses across a specified range of subjects and academic disciplines.	55.76%	63.65%
GE is that part of the higher education undergraduate curriculum that strengthens a student's capacity for understanding and appreciating diverse cultures, mastering multiple modes of inquiry, effectively analyzing and communicating information, and recognizing the importance of creativity and values to the human spirit..	34.17%	16.43%
GE ensures that a student has sufficient skills in	8.27%	19.22%

Areas Deemed to be Critical or Extremely Critical for General Education

Both faculty and students were presented with a list of eighteen areas and asked how critical each should be to students' general education experience at Kansas State University. Their choices were *Not Critical*, *Somewhat Critical*, *Critical*, and *Extremely Critical*. Chart 1 lists the eighteen areas, in descending order according to the percentage of *students* who

responded with one of the top two categories. Chart 2 sorts the same eighteen areas in descending order according to the percentage of *faculty* who responded the same way.

Chart 1

<u>Sorted by Student Response Ranking</u>	<u>%(Students)</u>	<u>%(Faculty)</u>
1 Oral and Written Communication Skills	88	95
2 Problem-Solving and Decision-Making	85	92
3 Reading and Comprehension Skills	85	94
4 Computer and Technology Skills	81	76
5 Self-Development	77	56
6 Logical Reasoning and Critical Thinking	75	92
7 Extended Knowledge in one Area	66	77
8 Local, Regional, National, and Int'l Issues	63	69
9 Wellness	62	54
10 Social Responsibility	59	49
11 Diversity/ Multicultural Competency]	54	63
12 Information Literacy	53	69
13 Social Sciences	43	55
14 Humanities	40	58
15 Natural Sciences	38	64
16 Foreign Languages	33	49
17 Data Analysis and Interpretation; Statistics	32	56
18 Fine Arts	26	42

Chart 2

<u>Sorted by Faculty Response Ranking</u>	<u>%(Students)</u>	<u>%(Faculty)</u>
1 Oral and Written Communication Skills	88	95
2 Reading and Comprehension Skills	85	94
3 Problem-Solving and Decision-Making	85	92
4 Logical Reasoning and Critical Thinking	75	92
5 Extended Knowledge in one Area	66	77
6 Computer and Technology Skills	81	76
7 Local, Regional, National, and Int'l Issues	63	69
8 Information Literacy	53	69
9 Natural Sciences	38	64
10 Diversity/ Multicultural Competency]	54	63
11 Humanities	40	58
12 Data Analysis and Interpretation; Statistics	32	56
13 Self-Development	77	56
14 Social Sciences	43	55
15 Wellness	62	54
16 Social Responsibility	59	49
17 Foreign Languages	33	49
18 Fine Arts	26	42

It's interesting to compare the two charts. While significance cannot be argued as yet for any apparent differences, faculty tended to rate areas as more critical than did students. There were four exceptions to the trend – Self-Development, Social Responsibility, Wellness, and Computer and Technology Skills.

At least 75% of both faculty and students designated five areas as either Critical or Extremely Critical – Oral and Written Communication Skills, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making, Reading and Comprehension Skills, Computer and Technology Skills, and Logical Reasoning and Critical Thinking. This is interesting, given both survey groups' preferences for the "breadth" definition of general education. The outcome may not reflect inconsistency. It may argue for a dual emphasis in general education programming, covering both basic skills and breadth.

Faculty Preference for Accountability for General Education

A majority of the faculty (54%) indicated that the university should be the administrative level accountable for general education. Twenty-nine percent (29%) selected the college, and sixteen percent (16%) selected the department.

Faculty Ranking of Possible Approaches to General Education

The faculty was asked to rank-order their top three choices from a list of possible schemes or approaches for general education at some point in the future. The Steering Committee was interested only in getting some sense of the range of opinions, so the descriptions were intentionally brief and admittedly vague.

Although preliminary analysis indicates some differences among the colleges in response to this item, we are not reporting those differences here. Perhaps the most obvious finding was the diversity of opinion. There was no clear leader selected as a first choice. To determine consensus, we looked at the results for each scheme when selected as any one of the respondents' top three choices.

More than 60% of the respondents ranked the third scheme, which emphasizes curriculum, as one of their top three choices: *"Here, a set of general education courses would be identified that would promote breadth in a student's program of study. Students would be required to take a specified number of hours from this set of courses."*

Close to 50% ranked the first scheme, a continuation of UGE, as one of their top three choices: *"UGE (University General Education) can be considered to have both pedagogical and curriculum components. It would be continued, along with efforts to improve it -- for instance, to encourage more UGE courses at the 300-level and above."*

Just under 50% ranked the fifth scheme, a combination of #3 and #4, as one of their top three choices: *"Have one university-wide course (as in option 4) that all freshmen would be required to take and to have additional breadth requirements (as in option 3)."*

The Null Scheme – *"don't worry about general education at the university level"* – was selected as one of the top three by only 10% of the faculty. The remaining four schemes were ranked as one of the top three choices by between 28%-35% of the respondents.

Student Perspectives about the Value of General Education

About 45% of the student respondents rated general education as important or very important in two aspects of their future lives.

	Very Important	Important
Career and Graduate Study	6.26%	38.17%
Personal Life	6.26%	36.26%

Approximately 60% rated what they are learning or have learned from general education at K-State as Very Valuable (12.52%) or Somewhat Valuable (48.17%).

When rating enjoyment of the general education component of their educational experience here at K-State, students' responses show a nearly perfect bell curve, with the clear majority having a mixed reaction.

I really enjoyed it and wish I could have taken more general education courses.		4.87%
I enjoyed most of my general education courses.		24.43%
Sometimes I enjoyed it; sometimes I didn't.		46.78%
I rarely enjoyed general education courses.		15.39%
I thought all general education courses were a waste of my time.		5.83%

Student Understanding of General Education

The equivalent of more than 50 pages of responses were elicited by the question, "If a prospective college student asked you to explain what is meant by the phrase 'general education,' what would you say?" It may take a while to discern what can be learned from all of these comments. A first perusal reveals a wide divergence of perspectives with some common themes, represented by the following statements: *courses that are required; courses outside the student's major; basic core classes; classes you have to get out of the way before you get to do what you want to do; help with everyday life; a place to go while you raise your GPA; classes which give a person a broader and more well-rounded view of various subjects; and I'm not sure!*

Want to Learn More?

The results for both surveys are available on the General Education Steering Committee website (www.ksu.edu/catl/GenEd). The unedited narrative comments from both faculty and students are included.

General Education Student Focus Group

November 9, 2004

Six students (three female and three male) representing the Colleges of Architecture Planning and Design, Arts and Sciences, and Human Ecology participated in the general education focus group conducted one evening in November 2004. The questions and a more comprehensive summary of the students' responses are available on the General Education Steering Committee website (www.ksu.edu/catl/GenEd). A brief overall summary is presented as part of this report.

Overall Summary

Although a small number of students attended the focus group, they were thoughtful and articulate participants whose perceptions may be useful food for thought as the university moves forward in the consideration of the future of general education at Kansas State University.

These students described diverse meanings of general education but all agreed that many of their peers question the need for general education. With the exception of the one senior in the group, they were not clear about which courses currently are approved for general education credit. They observed that students are often advised against taking general education courses, because the courses are not aligned with the students' programs of study.

When asked their preferences among the three survey definitions of general education, the consensus was to favor a partial combination of the breadth definition and the learning outcomes definition. All agreed that general education should provide an opportunity for students to strengthen their understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures, and they felt that was missing from the breadth definition.

There were differing opinions about areas critical to students' general education. Areas of focus appear to be dependent upon students' needs. For example, some students benefit from courses that emphasize self-development, and others benefit from skills-based classes.

Overall, these students believed that general education courses are essential for personal and career development. They expressed an interest in smaller classes, improved instruction, and discussion classes focusing on contemporary issues. Students noted differences in the quality of general education courses, some are considered an easy "A" and others facilitate intellectual curiosity.

Focus group participants conveyed a need for more general education class offerings and smaller, innovative "laboratory" classrooms. One said, "The university should clearly define what they want K-State graduates to learn related to general education." Others noted there should be a greater focus on "quality versus quantity" and a general education curriculum that encourages students to focus on "how to think" versus "what to think." These six participants strongly recommended that undergraduates play an active role in the ongoing discussions and deliberations about the future of general education at Kansas State University.

POSSIBLE SCHEMES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION AT KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

*General Education Steering Committee
December 1, 2004*

Before listing several possible future approaches to general education at K-State, we have three brief comments. First, because we were not charged with evaluating alternate schemes, the order of the schemes and commentary on them do not reflect any preferences by this committee. Secondly, most any of these schemes could be combined with another to produce still more alternatives. Finally, these were the schemes included in the faculty survey.

1. A continuation of our current system, UGE

UGE can be considered to have both pedagogical and curriculum components. In this possible future scheme, UGE would be continued, along with efforts to improve it -- for instance, to encourage more UGE courses at the 300-level and above. An alternative to the direct continuation of UGE would be to keep the basic UGE structure but to eliminate the pedagogical component.

2. A scheme that emphasizes pedagogy

In this approach, pedagogy (for instance, active learning or alternative pedagogical criteria) would be emphasized and few restrictions would be placed on which courses a student could take, as long as the courses met the pedagogical criteria. This scheme would be based on the assumption that active learning is a key component of students' learning, including learning to think.

3. A scheme that emphasizes curriculum

Here, a set of general education courses would be identified that would promote breadth in a student's program of study. Students would be required to take a specified number of hours from this set of courses. This would be similar to the alternative mentioned under Scheme 1. Scheme 3 might have the advantage of being a fresh start. An issue to consider in either Scheme 1 or 3 is whether basic-skills courses (such as English composition or mathematics) should be part of the general education system.

4. A scheme that uses special, university-wide courses

The idea here is to devise a set of university-wide courses that all students would take and that would emphasize the general education goals of the university. A benefit of such a scheme would be that all students would have some common experiences in their general education courses, experiences shaped by faculty members from across the university.

5. A combination of schemes 3 and 4

In this approach there would be just one university-wide course, for first-year students. There would also be breadth requirements (as in option 3). This scheme would be based on the assumption that the first year in college can be a particularly formative time in a student's progress towards a general education.

6. A scheme that emphasizes a student's free selection of courses

Here, all courses in the university could be available as general education courses for students, excluding those courses offered by their own major departments or academic programs. This scheme would recognize that many programs are geared to the acquisition of career skills, with many hours required in the major. The general education course sequence would be seen as serving purposes other than its own. For instance it would have the flexibility to contribute toward a student's pursuit of a minor emphasis or learning a language to fluency.

7. A scheme that emphasizes assessment of student learning outcomes

In this approach, results from assessment of SLOs (student learning outcomes) that relate to goals of general education would be analyzed and recommendations made by which the programs might better meet their undergraduates' general education needs. This scheme would allow more flexibility and less prescription than our current scheme (UGE), but would establish greater scrutiny of the results of general education.

8. The null scheme

Here we would not worry about general education at the university level. We included this in our options on the faculty survey as a measure of cynicism about general education (or about its institutionalization). We were encouraged to see that this was the least frequently selected scheme among the seven that we presented in the survey.