

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.