

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

SECTION THREE REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

**Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas**

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FOR

The Higher Learning Commission

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EVALUATION TEAM

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION

I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

A. History and Environment

Kansas State University (K-State or KSU) has a rich history. Through an enactment of the Kansas Legislature in 1863, it became the first in the nation to meet all of the requirements for becoming a land-grant school under the Morrill Act, beginning its existence as the Kansas State Agricultural College. It was first accredited by NCA in 1916. More information about K-State is found at <http://www.ksu.edu/>.

K-State has broadened its scope far beyond the provisions of its original land-grant charter and has become a comprehensive, research, land-grant university. In 1991 the Kansas Legislature merged the Kansas College of Technology, an associate-degree granting institution in the central Kansas city of Salina, with K-State, making it the University's ninth collegiate unit, now known as the College of Technology and Aviation. Today the University has 62 departments in the nine colleges of Agriculture, Architecture Planning and Design, Arts & Sciences, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Human Ecology, Veterinary Medicine, and Technology & Aviation. In addition, the Graduate School offers master's and doctoral programs in many fields.

Kansas State University is one of six Kansas Board of Regents universities. The Board, since its restructuring in 1999, also coordinates 19 community colleges and 11 technical colleges in the State of Kansas. In addition to its land-grant charter, K-State is considered as one of three research universities in Kansas, along with the University of Kansas and Wichita State University.

Today the main K-State campus covers 668 acres in the mid-America town of Manhattan, Kansas (population 45,000). The Manhattan campus, with numerous limestone-faced buildings framed by some rolling hills and woods, offers the visitor a very pleasant physical surrounding. The most notable aspect of the campus environment, however, is the comfortable sense of collegiality and community that seems to permeate the K-State campus, which has been fostered and nurtured in large part by the capable and remarkably stable K-State leadership team. At the time of this visit, the NCA Team finds K-State in a relatively salubrious and mature state on its recently steep developmental trajectory.

II. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, AND/OR EXEMPLARY AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

As a comprehensive research land-grant university, K-State has made many extraordinary documented accomplishments in the past ten years. Perhaps future historians might consider

the past K-State decade as a golden decade of renaissance and great accomplishments. The NCA Team recognizes and commends K-State on the following partial listing of great accomplishments:

- A. Significant improvement in the student enrollment and in the quality of the new undergraduate students, as evidenced by the average ACT composite score rising almost a full point in the past ten years.
- B. A dramatic jump in the extramural and sponsored research funding, increasing three-fold over the past ten years.
- C. An extraordinary 1.2 million square feet of new space to support teaching, research, and related activities, including the stunningly beautiful and functional addition and renovation of the main Hale Library.
- D. An exemplary leadership philosophy that achieves major stretch goals and, at the same time, sustains a community of trust and high morale across the University, including faculty, staff, and students.

III. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

In this Advancement section, the Team of consultant-evaluators offers its advice and suggestions to K-State in an effort to improve or advance the institution. These consultations do not affect the accreditation or assurance process.

Even though at the present time K-State seems to be at a comfortably salubrious and, in general, mature state of development, the Team has identified some possible institutional transitions ahead. The Team respectfully offers advice and suggestions on a few of the transitions below.

A. Transition for K-State and its Salina Campus

At the time of the prior (1992) NCA review, the College of Technology and Aviation at Salina had just (1991) been incorporated into K-State as an academic college. A number of issues were identified in the NCA report that would require vigilant attention in order to achieve a successful transition of this campus from a single-purpose institution with a quarter-century history to a new academic college of K-State. Plans called for a change in fee structure, capital improvements to physical facilities, addition of junior and senior courses required of baccalaureate degree programs, and upgrading of instructional and laboratory equipment.

The institution has made good progress with respect to these plans as well as in transforming the culture from an autonomous associate-degree granting institution to an academic college integrated into K-State. Strong and enthusiastic leadership is being provided, and it is evident that the change process is well underway. However, full alignment of policies and practices with the main K-State campus is not yet complete.

The history of the Salina campus precluded its development as a branch campus of K-State in the traditional sense. It presently operates as an academic college remote from the main campus rather than as a general-purpose branch campus of the University. However,

vestiges of its history as a separate institution remain. Some policy issues may warrant review in this regard. For example, arts, sciences and business faculty located on the Salina campus earn tenure in the College of Technology and Aviation and not in their respective discipline departments of K-State. These arrangements are being managed well and good academic coordination is being achieved. However, such practices are more indicative of the college functioning as a general-purpose branch campus than as a discipline-oriented College of Technology.

The urgent needs associated with adapting operations of the Salina campus into K-State have understandably taken precedence over long-term visioning and planning for the future role of the Salina campus within the K-State mission. *It may be fruitful at this point in the transition to consider assessing and visioning the long-term potential of the Salina campus. This could facilitate an in-depth study of the potential role the campus could ultimately play in the future growth of the University.*

A number of key questions could serve as stimuli for such study and are offered as illustrations.

a. Is K-State best served in its goals of excellence by the Salina faculties in the arts, sciences, and business being members of the College of Technology and Aviation rather than members of their respective discipline faculty (and college) of K-State?

b. Should the Salina campus focus only on continued delivery of engineering related and aviation technology programs?

c. Should the Salina campus strive to offer a broader range of existing K-State programs to the Salina community?

d. Should the Salina campus strive to offer graduate level education to the Salina community in technology areas or other K-State disciplines?

e. Should K-State focus on developing the Salina campus as a comprehensive College of Technology?

Such questions point to implications for the long-term role of the Salina campus within the fabric of the University as well as its potential contribution to fulfillment of the mission of K-State and achievement of its next level of excellence. A number of future directions exist for the Salina campus that hold substantial opportunities for robust development. It may be timely to examine its future strategically, holistically, and in depth.

B. Transition to a Mature Level of Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

In evaluating K-State relative to the matrix of assessment characteristics (see Assurance Section, Part V.C.3), the Team finds that K-State is at the beginning level of implementing assessment programs across the University, with the need to move into a mature level of assessment of student learning outcomes. To help advance K-State to a mature level, the Team suggests that *K-State design a comprehensive multi-level program to assess student learning outcomes in both undergraduate and graduate education.*

Such a program should include assessment at the university, college, and department levels, as well as the existing assessment component of the Undergraduate General Education (UGE) program. The program should also incorporate assessment in supporting areas such

as Student Affairs and the Library. The comprehensive program should emphasize the continuous improvement of student learning, even though results will sometimes be used for accountability purposes.

A multi-level approach to assessment is appropriate for a complex university like K-State. As mentioned by many individuals at the institution, the process of developing assessment plans and programs at the college and/or department level encourages faculty ownership of assessment and allows faculty to design assessment approaches that honor their own disciplinary cultures. At the same time, K-State has a history of administering surveys (e.g., alumni surveys) at the university level, and the institution recently began participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement. In addition, assessment in general education is underway, and the Faculty Senate is providing oversight for this process through the Academic Affairs Committee and the UGE Council. These initiatives can provide important information to complement and inform college and department assessment initiatives. The important question is, "How can the assessment program be designed so that all of these efforts fit together in providing useful information to improve student learning at K-State?"

One key step in answering that question might be to design a common conceptual framework that guides assessment at all levels. *The Team suggests that the existing framework in the UGE assessment program is appropriate to adopt and expand upon because it includes many of the following common components of good practice found in the assessment literature:*

- developing statements of intended learning outcomes that align with missions;

- ensuring that the curriculum provides opportunities for students to achieve the intended outcomes and receive feedback on their progress;

- identifying multiple measures for assessment, including measures that assess learning both directly (e.g., papers, projects, portfolios, performances) and indirectly (e.g., alumni, employer, and student surveys);

- using findings to make changes in curriculum and instruction that will enhance learning;

- sharing the results of the process with key constituencies (e.g., current and prospective students, advisory committees, legislators, etc.).

Developing and disseminating this type of framework, along with principles of good practice in assessment found in the literature (see, for example, those of the American Association of Higher Education) would be useful to faculty, students, and administrators designing assessment plans and programs at all levels – university, college, and department.

Another key step in designing a comprehensive assessment program at K-State might be to *develop an infrastructure to embed assessment in the university culture and ensure the sustainability of the program.* In order to develop a "culture of evidence" at K-State, it will be necessary to identify fundamental ways to link the assessment process to existing processes at the University, e.g., curricular change, strategic planning, budgeting, promotion and tenure, etc. The infrastructure should include the participation of key stakeholders in the assessment process (e.g., Faculty Senate, students, college and university administration, Student Affairs, institutional research, etc.). It should provide for educating the University community about the assessment process and providing administrative leadership to ensure smooth implementation of the assessment program. Faculty ownership of assessment should be central to the structure because the faculty who develop the goals of the curriculum and deliver it should also be those who evaluate its effectiveness in promoting learning.

Finally, K-State should also *consider how its assessment program could complement other important initiatives related to learning on campus.* A vibrant national dialogue about the importance of developing learning-centered campuses has been taking place for at least a decade. This dialogue is reflected in the nature of K-State's general education program with its focus on active and experiential learning, as well as in many faculty development initiatives on campus related to improved teaching and learning. These initiatives represent the beginning of a shift from a teaching-centered to a learning-centered campus, and to continue this transformation, it will be important to develop the assessment program in concert with them.

C. Transition to New Funding and Leadership Realities

Since the last NCA visit in 1992, significant strides have been made in improvement of physical facilities, library acquisitions, and information technology. Each of these represents an area that will require continued investment to maintain progress that has been accomplished as well as to move the institution forward to the next level of achievement. For example, several funding sources have been identified to increase the library acquisitions budget by nearly 2 million dollars; however, serials inflation is in the range of \$350,000 per year. Thus the increased base funding will have a limited life in terms of keeping pace with inflation. Similarly, the "crumbling classrooms" initiative of the legislature helped the campus make important improvements to the campus in terms of life-safety issues, high tech classrooms and ADA compliance. Nonetheless, the campus has identified several additional major capital projects that should be undertaken to complete the campus upgrades that are needed to provide the modern facilities required to support first class teaching and research. Information technology is another area that will require continued significant financial investment to maintain the necessary support for the information technology needs in the future. For example, updating telecommunications technologies supported by the ten-year old Dole Center is a concern for the future. *These areas represent major cost centers for the foreseeable future. The Team strongly suggests that the institution devote considerable energy to identifying additional sources of revenue to maintain and build upon the accomplishments it has worked so hard to achieve over the past ten years.*

The new tuition ownership policy presents important opportunities for K-State because it provides for institutional autonomy and flexibility. The model provides for decisions to be made about funding institutional priorities, and it presents several significant policy options. For example, decisions must be made about "earmarked" fees as contrasted with general tuition revenue which can be allocated in a more flexible manner, and financial aid leveraging and tuition discounting policies will need to be determined. In addition, programmatic decisions, which drive budget allocations, will be the responsibility of institutional leaders rather than the more distant state policymakers. In this light, the Team suggests that *the institution seriously consider the need for new consultation and communication processes to optimize the new funding model.*

The new funding model does not create new sources of revenues. Current efforts to improve funding levels by improving advocacy among business leaders (e.g., Hall family commitment) are admirable. Even with the best intentions, however, advocacy groups can, over time, move in directions that may create other issues for institutions. Thus, institutional leaders are advised to *stay closely connected to business groups and to the Regents to ensure that the University's needs both for increased funding and for appropriate policy development are met.*

The Team heard the following point raised often enough to make this delicate observation. The current K-State leadership team is highly regarded and credited with making very significant progress at the institution. The top leadership group is very stable and has been working together for over a decade and a half. Nevertheless, a transition in the leadership will occur. *Care and thoughtful consideration should be given to the inevitable leadership transitions at K-State to assure that momentum for the institution is not lost.*

D. Transition to Further Enhancement of International Emphases

Since the last NCA visit, K-State had pursued with vigor “enhancing International emphases,” one of its strategic themes. This was demonstrated, for example, by the creation of the Office of International Programs, fundraising initiatives for both scholarships and facilities, and the establishment and/or enhancement of college-level programs. As a result, K-State enjoys an environment in which greater coordination of international activities, meaningful study abroad programs, and programs in various countries are the norm.

“Enhancement of international emphases” continues to be identified as one of K-State’s major initiatives in the most current strategic plan, recognizing that while much was accomplished during the 1990s, much more needs to be fulfilled before the institution can claim success in this area. The Team strongly encourages K-State to *think deeply and creatively about what it can do to further advance its international initiative*. One means, for example, through which all students can be engaged, would be to require that at least one of the General Education courses deal substantially with international issues. Another way to advance the international effort would be to consider bringing relevant administrative units together, such as moving the International Student Center under the associate provost for International programs. Finally, of course, continued fundraising for this area is likely to result in enhanced and improved international programs and activities.

E. Transition to a Deeper Realization of Diversity at K-State

As mentioned before, (see the Assurance Section, Part V.B.2), the Team is concerned about K-State’s relatively modest progress toward broadening racial and gender diversity. In the past five years, enrollment of Hispanic students has increased, but the enrollments of Black, Asian, and Native American students have not; and only small increases in Black, Hispanic, and Native American faculty have been observed. While recognizing that the University faces certain constraints in moving towards a more diversified campus in a State that is very homogeneous in its racial composition, the University might consider other avenues of diversification. Beyond the obvious step of recruitment at both the student and faculty levels, *consideration might also be given to facilitating promotion within the existing faculty of women and minorities to administrative posts*, such as departmental chairs or heads, deans, etc. This would not only help to diversify the campus at various levels, but could also provide a morale boost to these important components of the existing faculty.

The fact that the State is relatively homogeneous makes the qualitative diversity experience for K-State students even more important. Diversity, both in quantity and in quality, is as much a part of being a top-tier land-grant university as are the many other areas in which K-State has made major moves forward in the past ten years. K-State has demonstrated, time and time again, that when it sets its collective vision on stretch goals, it can and will creatively achieve them. The Team has good reasons to be confident that K-State can and will make great strides towards a deeper realization of diversity in many different aspects of the University in the next ten years.