

**REPORT OF A
COMMISSION-MANDATED FOCUSED VISIT**

Assurance Section

TO

**Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas**

February 21-22, 2005

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**A. Purpose of Visit**

The Evaluation Team for the comprehensive visit in 2001 recommended a focused visit to evaluate whether the institution is making progress in implementing a program to assess student learning outcomes. The 2001 Evaluation Team indicated that, by the time of the focused visit in 2005, there should be evidence that K-State is moving toward maturing levels of continuous improvement and that faculty, students, and administrators across the university are involved in the assessment process.

B. Accreditation Status

Kansas State University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association with a focused visit on assessment due in 2004-2005 and the next comprehensive evaluation due in 2011-2012.

C. Organizational Context

Kansas State University (K-State or KSU) was founded on February 16, 1863 under the Morrill Act as a land-grant college, originally known as Kansas State Agricultural College. It was first accredited by NCA in 1916. Since then, it has developed into a comprehensive, research, land-grant university.

The main campus covers 688 acres in the city of Manhattan, Kansas. In 1991, K-State's College of Technology and Aviation was established via a merger with the former Kansas College of Technology in the city of Salina, Kansas, about 70 miles west of Manhattan, Kansas.

Kansas State University has had stable leadership for the past 18 years; President Wefald was in office during the last two NCA visits and this focused visit. At the time of this 2005 focused visit, K-State has nine colleges and about 23,000 students.

Kansas State University is one of six Kansas Board of Regents universities. It is considered as one of three research universities in the state; the others are the University of Kansas and Wichita State University. The Kansas Board of Regents, restructured in 1999, governs six state universities as well as supervises and coordinates nineteen community colleges, eleven technical colleges and schools, and a municipal university.

D. Unique Aspects of Visit

There were no unique aspects to this visit.

E. Interactions with Organizational Constituencies

President

Provost
Associate Provost
Associate Vice Provost for Research
Associate Provost for Diversity and Dual Career Development
Special Assistant to the Provost
Interim Assistant Director, APR

Senior Associate Dean, Student Life
Director, Counseling Services

Director, PILOTS Program
Director, Education Support Services and McNair Scholars
Exec. Dir., Kansas Campus Compact

Associate Dean, Graduate School
Chair, Graduate School CARC

Faculty Senate President
Faculty Senate President Elect
Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee (8 faculty)

Director, Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning

Assistant Dean of Diversity, A&S, and Director, Tilford Group
Arts & Sciences CARC (5 faculty)

Assessment Facilitators Committee (11 faculty)
University General Education Council (6 faculty)

Dept Chairs Outside A&S (8 faculty)

Faculty: High enrollment degree programs (10 faculty)
Faculty: High enrollment degree programs (6 faculty)

Faculty: First-year experience classes (5 faculty)
Faculty: First-year experience classes (5 faculty)

Students (7 students)
Students (10 students)

F. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

K-State Undergraduate Catalog
Undergraduate Assessment Plans: Arts and Sciences (Resource Room)
Undergraduate Assessment Plans: Architecture (Resource Room)
Undergraduate Assessment Plans: Agriculture (Resource Room)
SAILS

Web Sources:
Assessment Newsletters

Assessment Manual
Steps in the development and maintenance of an assessment plan
Assessment of UGE and KSU
Tilford Group website
Report on UGE

II. AREA(S) OF FOCUS

A-1. Statement of Focus

To evaluate whether the institution is making progress in implementing a program to assess student learning outcomes in both undergraduate and graduate education. There should be evidence that Kansas State University is moving toward maturing levels of continuous improvement and that faculty, students, and administrators across the University are involved in the assessment process. The following statements of evidence are matched to the comments of the 2001 NCA-HLC Team Report.

B-1. Statements of Evidence

- **Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.**

- *The Team finds that K-State is at the beginning level of implementing assessment programs across the University, with little evidence of making much progress beyond the beginning level. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 12)*

K-State is on the cusp of maturing stages of continuous improvement. The University has defined student learning outcomes, as have almost all academic programs and many support programs. Three-year assessment plans have been submitted by most programs and some programs are already into continuous improvement.

- *Structures are needed for: educating the University community about assessment; providing administrative leadership that will lead to embedding the assessment process in the institutional culture; and ensuring the sustainability of the assessment program. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

Structures are in place for assessment.

- The Assessment and Program Review (APR) Office assists and provides guidance for faculty, departments, and colleges.
- University has supported attendance at assessment-related conferences and sponsored workshops to assist in developing the assessment process.
- An Assessment Facilitators Committee provides a vehicle for cross-institutional sharing and support.

- College Assessment Review Committees (CARC) are active at the College level
- Institutional Advancement (IA) is the organizational unit responsible for the co-curricular experiences of students (Academic Assistance Center, Academic and Career Information Center, Counseling Center, etc.).

Administrative leadership is in place that will lead to embedding the assessment process in the institutional culture:

- The new provost has re-enforced the institutional agenda in setting up structures for implementing the assessment program.
- The Assessment and Program Review Office reports to the Associate Provost.
- The review of the deans will incorporate the success of their respective colleges in assessment efforts.
- The faculty member serving as special assistant to the Provost on assessment is a powerful advocate for assessment and reflects the general support of the Faculty Senate for assessment activities.
- The Kansas Board of Regents has also mandated assessment activities for all institutions in the system.

• Moreover, there is not agreement about the types of information that constitute an effective outcomes assessment strategy; as a result, the ability to develop effective assessment plans and programs is limited. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)

The Faculty Senate has endorsed the University Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), and unit SLOs for evaluating academic and support services have been drafted in ways that complement them. This is indicative that there is buy-in across the institution. The system has ample provisions for flexibility in defining and assessing the outcomes.

• There is not presently a coherent, widespread understanding that the purpose of assessment is the continuous improvement of student learning (although this understanding is reflected in the assessment of the University General Education program). (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)

Discussions with formal and *ad hoc* groups of faculty, administrators, and students demonstrate that there is presently a coherent widespread understanding that the purpose of assessment is the continuous improvement of student learning. Institutional Advancement (IA) communicates principles of community embedded in the culture of KSU. As stated in the

Undergraduate Catalog (2004-2006, page 4) the University 'strives to create an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and growth...and (students) are expected to demonstrate ability in at least five essential areas [referring to the learning outcomes].' Meetings with staff as well as students confirmed a clear understanding and support of the learning outcomes. Staff referred to programming activity and its connection to outcomes; students verbalized the importance of learning outcomes in connection to class work, (as spelled out in syllabi) and to their future workplace. Both groups are cognizant of the University efforts to refine and integrate assessment in the daily work of the community and ultimately, its integration into the campus culture. Moreover, the shared experience of defining student outcomes appears to have generated greater faculty support.

- *There is also some evidence that student learning outcomes assessment is being confused with other forms of evaluation such as academic program review, accreditation, etc. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 12)*

From discussions regarding the differences and from reading unit plans, it appears that there is now an understanding of the relationship between assessment, internal academic program review, and accreditation. Efforts are underway to integrate accrediting standards with University SLOs and HLC approaches to assessment.

- *Faculty ownership of assessment in academic programs has not developed consistently across campus. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

Faculty ownership varies from high degree of ownership to compliance. It is notable that some of the initial force behind the initiative came from leadership in the Faculty Senate. There is some evidence that faculty are mentoring graduate students in assessment, particularly those who are teaching assistants under their supervision.

- *Students have not participated in the development or implementation of the University's assessment program. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

Students have participated in the development or implementation within the traditions of student representation at K-State. Increasingly faculty members are stating their student learning objectives in their syllabi and often relating them to the University SLOs to enhance student understanding of the assessment program.

- *Assessment in graduate education has not begun. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

Assessment of graduate education has begun. The SLOs for graduate education are: skills, knowledge, and professional conduct. Assessment plans have been approved or are being revised prior to May 2005. Collection of data will commence in fall 2005.

- *By the time of the focused visit in 2005, there should be evidence that K-State is moving towards maturing levels of continuous improvement and that faculty, students, and administrators across the University are involved in the assessment process. (2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 12)*

Faculty, students, and administrators across the University are involved in assessment activity:

- K-State has put great effort into educating faculty and others, as noted above.
- Programs that have relationships with accrediting agencies are well along towards continuous improvement and are constructing relevant links between professional standards and local SLOs.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.**

A great many programs are at the point of just beginning to collect data. Thus, many units--especially those that do not have relationships with accrediting agencies--have not yet entered into a feedback/change mode of continuous improvement. K-State has to keep up the momentum.

K-State needs to think seriously about the sustainability of the assessment program as presently configured: how will the institution maintain the assessment activity while reducing (or, in some cases, dismantling) the elaborate structures that have been put in place and the time committed to this program? Presently there is a great amount of labor intensive activity that will dissipate over time as other priorities requiring attention and scarce resources are addressed.

- *There is not presently a coherent, widespread understanding that the purpose of assessment is the continuous improvement of student learning (although this understanding is reflected in*

*the assessment of the University General Education program).
(2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

The general education assessment pilot noted in the 2001 Team Report has been deemed unworkable for mass implementation. Currently, there seems to be confusion as to the locus of responsibility for assessing the University's General Education Student Learning Outcomes. The University General Education Council reviews courses for GE according to the course characteristics, which is more an input measure than an outcomes measure. No group interviewed believed it to be its responsibility to conduct outcomes assessment, despite the understood General Education SLOs: critical thinking, communication skills, and educated habits.

The NCA-HLC will undoubtedly be looking at this aspect of assessment very carefully, so it would be in K-State's best interest to resolve this issue as soon as possible, but prior to the next comprehensive visit at the latest.

*• No plans have been made to assess the effectiveness and equivalency of student learning in distance learning programs.
(2001 NCA-HLC Team Report, page 9)*

There is evidence of evaluation of student support services for distance education based on discussion in the assessment facilitators meeting. However, academic units offering distance education programs will have to decide whether on-campus assessment techniques are applicable or if new ways to assess distance education need to be developed.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention and Commission follow-up are required.**

None

- **Evidence is insufficient and demonstrates that Commission sanction is warranted.**

None

C. Other Accreditation Issues [If applicable]

None

D. Recommendation of Team

- **Evidence sufficiently demonstrated. No Commission follow-up recommended.**

E. Rationale for the Team Recommendation

The administration and the faculty have teamed to set up structures to educate faculty on assessment and to provide assistance in implementing an effective assessment program. All units are either gathering assessment data or will begin measurements by September 2005. The momentum of change to an assessment culture was evident to the Team and we have every confidence that the institution will be at a mature stage of continuous improvement across all units within the next two-to-three years.

III. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS**Affiliation Status****Nature of Organization**

Legal status Public

Degrees awarded A, B, M, D, 1st prof.

Conditions of Affiliation

Stipulation on affiliation status None

Approval of degree sites Prior Commission approval required

Approval of distance education degree No prior Commission approval required

Reports required None

Other Visits Scheduled None

Commission Sanction or Adverse Action: None

Summary of Commission Review

Year for next comprehensive evaluation 2011-2012

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Advancement Section

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION**CONSULTATION OF TEAM****A. Observations of Team Regarding Area(s) of Focus**

The assessment of general education outcomes is a challenge in all institutions. The current review of the University General Education program may provide an avenue for revisiting the matter of outcomes assessment and clearly defining the locus of responsibility.

The Team suggests that the University consider adding a statement in the catalog on assessment that would inform students about assessment and its purposes.

We recognize that K-State has had good participation in using indirect assessment measures. However, K-State might consider whether greater student involvement in development or review of assessments would be beneficial in enhancing student understanding of, and possibly participation in, surveys and practices that require extra-curricular participation.

K-State has established some very fine web resources to assist in assessment planning and implementation. Continued attention to updating and refining may alleviate some of the heavy time and effort costs of University-wide assessment.

B. Consultations of the Team

See above

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION and STATE: Kansas State University, KS

TYPE OF REVIEW (*from ESS*): Focused Visit

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW: A visit focused on assessment

DATES OF REVIEW: 2/21/05 - 2/22/05

Nature of Organization

LEGAL STATUS: Public

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

DEGREES AWARDED: A, B, M, D, 1st Prof

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

Conditions of Affiliation

STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS: None.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF NEW DEGREE SITES: Prior Commission approval required.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES: No prior Commission approval required.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

REPORTS REQUIRED: None

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

OTHER VISITS REQUIRED: Focused Visit: 2004 - 2005; A visit focused on assessment

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: None

Summary of Commission Review

YEAR OF LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2001 - 2002

YEAR OF NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2011 - 2012

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: No Change

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

INSTITUTION and STATE: Kansas State University, KS

TYPE OF REVIEW:

Educational Programs

	Program Distribution	Recommended Change (+ or -)
Programs leading to Undergraduate		
	Associate	10
	Bachelors	92
Programs leading to Graduate		
	Masters	64
	Specialist	0
	First Professional	1
	Doctoral	39

Off-Campus Activities

In-State:	Present Activity:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	Salina (KSU-Salina)	
Sites:	Ft. Leavenworth (U.S. Army Command General Staff Col) ; Overland Park; Wichita; Abilene; Kansas City	
Course Locations:	14	
Out-of-State:	Present Wording:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	None	
Sites:	None	
Course Locations:	Johnston, IA (GR ESL Certificate) ; Red Oak, IA (GR ESL Certificate)	
Out-of-USA:	Present Wording:	Recommended Change: (+ or -)
Campuses:	None	
Sites:	None	
Course Locations:	None	

Distance Education Certificate and Degree Offerings:

Present Offerings:

B.S. Animal Science & Industry offered via Video/CD ROM; B.S. Dietetics offered via Internet; B.S. Early Childhood Education offered via Internet; B.S. Food Science & Industry offered via Video/CD ROM; B.S. General Business offered via Video/CD ROM; B.S. Interdisciplinary Social Sciences offered via Internet; GR Academic Advising Certificate offered via Internet; GR Early Childhood Education Administration Creden offered via Internet; GR Early Childhood Education Certificate offered via Internet; GR English as a 2nd Lang Certificate-Elementary Ed offered via Video/CD ROM; GR English as a 2nd Lang Certificate-Secondary Ed offered via Video/CD ROM; GR Food Science Certificate offered via Internet; GR Occupational Health Psychology Certificate offered via Internet; GR Personal Financial Planning Certificate offered via Internet; M.A. Environmental Planning & Management offered via Internet; M.S. Agribusiness offered via Internet; M.S. Chemical Engineering offered via Video/CD ROM; M.S. Civil Engineering offered via Internet; M.S. Electrical Engineering offered via Video/CD ROM; M.S. Engineering Management offered via Video/CD ROM; M.S. Food Science & Industry offered via Internet; M.S. Industrial & Organizational Psychology offered via Internet; M.S. Software Engineering offered via Internet; Ph.D. History offered via Video/CD ROM; UG Early Childhood Education Administration Creden offered via Internet; UG Food Science Certificate offered via Internet

Recommended Change:

(+ or -)