Attachment 2

University General Education Proposal – Where do we go from here?

The accompanying flow chart (based on a proposal from Dr. Vicki Clegg) describes the progress of the General Education Taskforce proposal from its development to implementation. The flow chart is not designed to be an inflexible mandate, but serves as a guideline for shared governance through the entire process. The insertion of additional approval points, beyond the desired acceptance of the current proposal by Faculty Senate, ensures involvement by the appropriate faculty and administration governance units as the proposal becomes more complete. This path involves several checks and balances, reflecting shared governance in the development and implementation of the complete proposal. Thus it includes several additional decision points (diamond-shaped boxes) where faculty senators can effect changes during the process. This is in response to concerns about aspects of the proposal which are still undetermined (assessment and course-tagging); it will be important to consider these aspects, along with the current proposal, as a single entity prior to implementation. It is our firm belief that faculty senators, and faculty members in general, should be involved in ensuring that this program has all necessary elements in place before implementation. We hope that this will also ensure a higher level of investment of the teaching faculty in a program which will ultimately affect the education of every student enrolled at Kansas State University.

Senate approval of the proposal (including this flow chart) will initiate several actions by the Provost. These include designating an institutional official to oversee development of the complete proposal (provost-designate), charging department heads to begin the task of tagging courses under the new K-State Eight categorization, setting up a General Education Council, in collaboration with deans and department heads, and charging the Office of Assessment to develop an assessment plan. The overall goal would be integration of assessment and course tagging into the current proposal, such that implementation could be achieved without undue negative impacts on current degree programs.

Once the courses have been identified AND an assessment plan has been developed, the GE Council, in collaboration with the Provost-designate and other GE leaders (registrar, current UGE Council, CATL, etc.), will submit a **complete** proposal to the Academic Affairs Committee. If the committee approves the **complete** proposal, it will be put to a vote of the full Senate. If the Senate confers approval, the Provost will be charged with implementation. This will include communication with the registrar, advisors, department heads, the Office of Assessment and other entities who will be involved in the implementation phase. In addition, the Provost will be responsible for ensuring that the program has adequate resources prior to implementation.

It is apparent that the missing pieces (assessment and course-tagging) represent significant hurdles on the pathway to implementation, and also would require significant investment of time and effort by faculty members and department heads even after implementation. Thus it is reasonable to allow these entities to effect modification throughout the process, as the complete program becomes more fully developed. Included below are some additional thoughts on the processes and outcomes yet to be addressed before implementation of this proposal.

Thoughts on modifications to the K-State Eight

Even after significant discussions with the Taskforce members, we remain convinced that the K-State Eight areas could be further refined. Three suggestions, and justifications, follow.

1) Addition of an area that would address human interactions with technology and the environment, reflecting the land-grant nature of KSU, would, we believe, improve the breadth of the GE program and also ensure that additional courses in colleges outside of Arts & Sciences could be added to the approved list.

2) Addition of a component that emphasized information literacy, a component of many modern GE programs at similar institutions, might also serve to enhance the breadth of the program, the education of our students, and again increase the number of potential GE courses in non-A&S colleges.
3) Fusion of two or more of the current areas (e.g.,Global Issues and Perspectives, Human Diversity within the U.S., Social Sciences) into an area that emphasizes global issues would seem to be better aligned with the university's recent push to have more of our students gain international experience and perspectives.

These changes would be especially warranted if it becomes apparent, during the course-tagging process outlined above, that additional courses could be gained by such additions and fusions. Additionally, if the course-tagging process results in a course list where the vast majority of GE courses are housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, we request that these changes be considered as well. General Education needs to involve educators in all colleges of a land-grant university, and KSU will be ill-served if the final program draws too heavily on one college to deliver an experience that should be university-wide.

Thoughts on Course-tagging

82% of the courses currently approved as UGE courses are taught in the College of Arts and Sciences. The percentage of students taking UGE courses in that college is probably higher than that, since many of the current A&S UGE courses have multiple sections, and many of the current non-A&S UGE courses have only one section. If the experience is truly meant to establish a "breadth of learning", efforts will have to be made to ensure that students can choose courses that reflect the breadth of the college experience at KSU. Potential problems with the new GE curriculum in colleges with highly structured curricula might also be ameliorated if additional UGE credit hours in those colleges were available to their students.

Therefore we suggest that the course-tagging process be initiated with a request from the provost to department heads, asking not only for the list of courses that would meet the new GE guidelines, but also for more details about the number of sections taught, and the availability of spaces for non majors. This level of detail will allow the GE council and the GE leadership to assess the true distribution of available GE hours across colleges, and should enable the development of a program that is more balanced among the colleges at KSU. If the current imbalance remains after all courses have been tagged, efforts should be made to modify the proposal, as noted in the section above.

Thoughts on Assessment Planning

Assessment of General Education can occur at one of three levels; course-level, program-level, & institutional level. In addition, the type of assessment used will also depend on the components and the focus of the GE program. For example, if the GE program at KSU is to eventually include a First-Year Experience (which was part of the original charge for the GE Taskforce), assessment will have a different focus than if this component is not included. In addition, assessment of the proposed content-based GE program will be significantly different, and probably significantly more resource-intensive, compared to the current pedagogy-based program at KSU. Thus it might be useful to reflect, at this early stage, on some aspects of the assessment plan that should be emphasized, and some that might be avoided.

As with other assessment plans, it will be important to initially develop and approve a set of learning outcomes. These outcomes must align with the content of the courses (not the pedagogy, as in the current program), and they must be clearly communicated to the relevant faculty members (i.e., those teaching in courses which are designated as GE courses). Given the scope of a general education program, it is probably prudent to develop broad outcomes,

and to plan to assess these in a multi-year cycle (e.g. not all outcomes will be assessed in any given year). The choice of outcomes is critical, and will require multidisciplinary attention by the members of the multidisciplinary GE Council discussed above. Alignment of the GE outcomes with the current university SLOs might be possible, but should not be forced if it becomes apparent that GE assessment cannot be performed within the framework that is already in place for those SLOs.

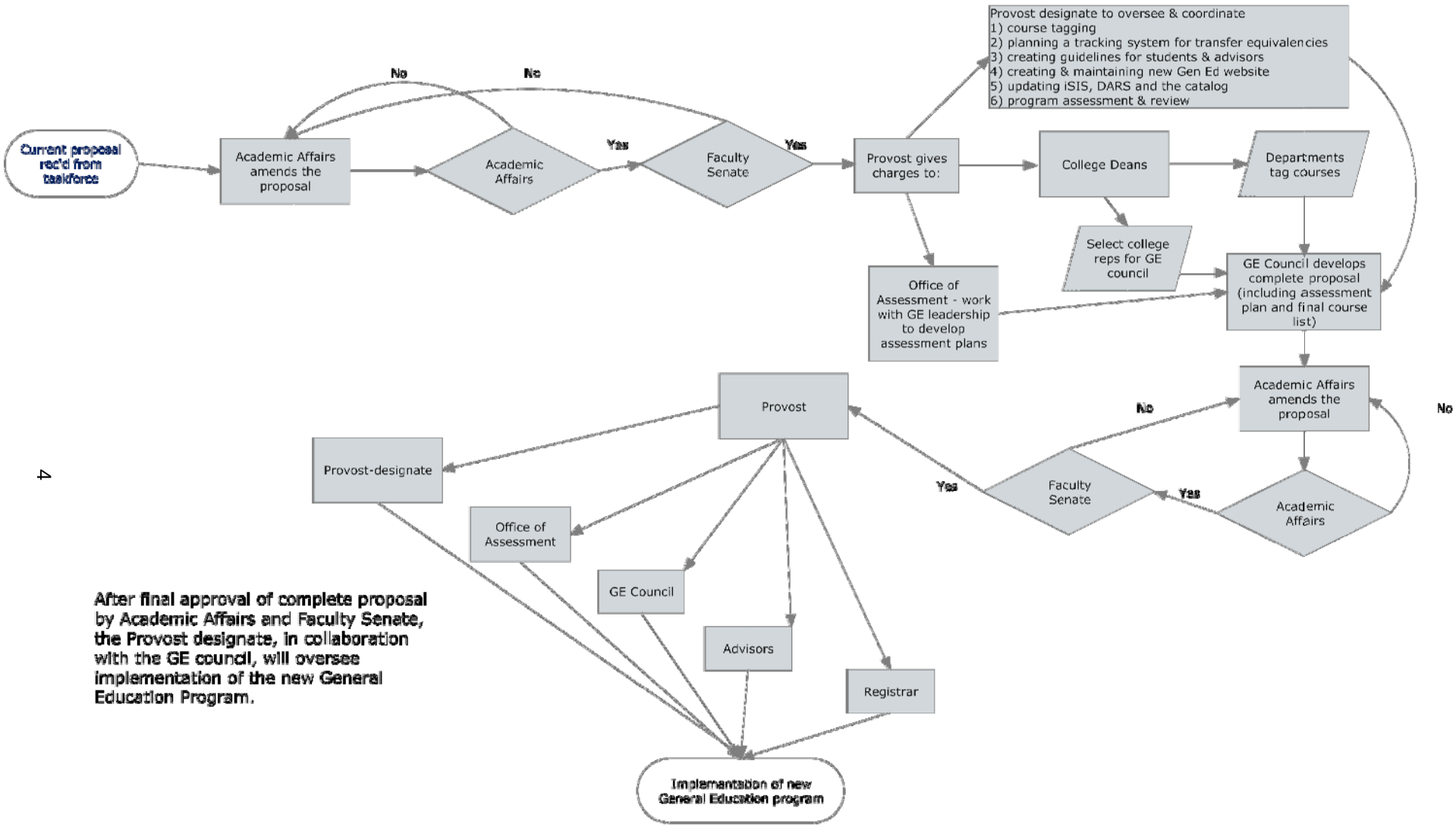
Development of any assessment plan should keep firmly in mind the principle that faculty time is the most precious commodity at a university. Assessment plans should reflect an awareness of this reality. Plans which require significant additional faculty time commitments must be accompanied by appropriate resources (e.g. release time) to compensate the affected faculty members. In addition, in order to ensure that faculty members teaching GE courses are invested in the assessment of those courses, the plan should be meaningful, manageable, and sustainable. Deviations from these three parameters will result in minimization of faculty investment, low morale, and other negative outcomes. Resources are critical, and it will be important for the university administration to identify and manage the needed resources so that the efforts of all affected faculty members (including members of the Taskforce who developed the original proposal) are not in vain.

Given the importance of alignment of the outcomes to be assessed with the content of the courses, it seems likely that a course-based assessment plan will not be optimal. Communication among all of the instructors of GE courses would be critical for this to work, and this communication, while possible, is rarely achieved. Course-based GE assessment is rarely used at other large and diverse institutions; this is most likely a reflection of the logistical difficulty of ensuring consistency across the broad range of courses. Course-based assessment works well for pedagogy-based GE programs, but is less useful for content-based programs such as that represented by the proposal in hand.

Program-level assessment presents similar logistical problems. Since each of the K-State Eight represents a “program”, it will be difficult to determine a content-based outcome that will be applicable across the variety of courses that are included in any single program area. Communication among instructors in different departments and colleges would have to be extensive and ongoing; this is again a resource-intensive approach (consuming much faculty time) that probably works better at smaller, less diverse institutions.

The Taskforce proposal includes a suggestion that capstone projects or courses could be used in assessment of the GE program. This suggestion may be well-intentioned, but it is ill-advised. Current capstone courses are often designed to meet accrediting requirements, and would not easily accommodate new objectives. Additionally, assessment of yet-to-be developed GE outcomes, from courses in many different departments, and unique to each student, is not a reasonable expectation for departmental capstone courses. Finally, programs without capstone courses tend to be the largest programs, where development of new courses would require significant new resources. For these reasons, we suggest that GE assessment steer away from using capstone courses as a vehicle.

The final option, institutional-level assessment, remains open and should be fully explored during the development of the assessment plan. This can involve standardized tests, given to a representative sample of incoming and graduating students, as long as the tests are aligned with the outcomes developed as described above. Examples of such tests that should be carefully evaluated include the NSSE/BCSSE duo (http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm), which seems to be closely aligned with the intentions of the current proposal, and would yield, for a nominal cost, data which will aid in our other assessment and retention efforts as well. Finally, this institutional-level plan would reflect an understanding, as mentioned above, that faculty time is the most important resource at this university.



After final approval of complete proposal by Academic Affairs and Faculty Senate, the Provost designate, in collaboration with the GE council, will oversee implementation of the new General Education Program.