A PROPOSAL

THE K-STATE 8: GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

2007-2008 General Education Task Force

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The 2007-2008 General Education Task Force submits for Faculty Senate consideration this proposal – that Kansas State University adopt a new system of general education to ensure that every student begins to develop *"a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that [are the] hallmarks of being college educated"* (Higher Learning Commission's Statement on General Education).

The Proposed K-State 8: General Education Program encourages students to be intellectual explorers and assists students in developing a diverse set of *beginning literacies* to reflect a breadth of general knowledge. This broad exposure is designed to awaken and ignite students' interest in varying disciplines, while also teaching knowledge and skills expected of college-educated individuals.

Within the K-State 8, students and advisors will plan programs of study to promote exposure to a breadth of learning that includes the eight areas below. The emphasis and the amount of study in each area will undoubtedly vary for each student, depending upon his/her choice of major and other interests. Nevertheless, each student's program of study must demonstrate an exploration of all eight (8) areas. (See Appendix for a detailed description of each area.)

The K-State 8 Areas:
- Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding
- Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning
- Ethical Reasoning and Responsibility
- Global Community
- Historical Perspectives
- Human Diversity within the U.S.
- Natural and Physical Sciences
- Social Sciences

In addition to the emphasis on a breadth of knowledge, this proposal acknowledges the importance of the skills of communication and critical thinking. Developing proficiencies in these intellectual skills is not, nor should it be, exclusive to any program of general education. We recognize that all undergraduate courses – including those within the major fields – should offer students numerous opportunities to develop competencies in communication skills and critical thinking. All K-State undergraduates should purposefully seek courses and experiences that will challenge them to enhance their abilities in these skill areas.

Implementation

Successful implementation of a new general education program at Kansas State University will require cooperation and coordination among faculty members, advisors, students, and administrators at all levels – department, college and university. There are many practicalities to consider.

Tagging Courses
Credit-bearing courses and experiences will be clearly tagged for each K-State 8 area in order for students and advisors to create students' programs of study.

The Task Force recommends including credit-bearing experiences as a way to meet K-State 8 requirements. We cannot provide an all-inclusive list, but examples might be study abroad, an internship, leadership in a major university activity, a research project in collaboration with a faculty member, capstone experiences, etc. Like courses, such experiences would have to be credit bearing.

Tagging a course/experience – designating the appropriate K-State 8 area(s) – will be the responsibility of the program or department teaching it. A single course/experience may be tagged for up to two (2) K-State 8 areas.

As part of the tagging, the program/department responsible for the course/experience will indicate if it is open to:
    a) only majors,
    b) only non-majors, or
    c) all students.

The programs/departments should use the following decision matrix and the area descriptions in the Appendix when tagging courses/experiences for the K-State 8. The Task Force suggests that all undergraduate courses and experiences that meet the criteria should be tagged.

DECISION MATRIX: TAGGING COURSES/EXPERIENCES

Criteria for Tagging Courses/Experiences	NO – action	YES – action
1. Do the principal student learning outcomes* of the course/experience focus on one or two of the K-State 8 areas?	NO – do not tag	YES – tag with one (1) or two (2) K-State 8 areas. Go to step #2
2. Is the course/experience appropriate for non-majors?	NO – designate for majors only	YES – designate for non-majors or for both majors and non-majors

*A principal student learning outcome (SLO) is a substantial outcome that is essential in the students' work in the course/experience and for which the teacher implements significant strategies to evaluate student learning in the area.

Course Application Guidelines
Each student must successfully complete a credit-bearing course/experience tagged in each K-State 8 area for a total of at least eighteen (18) credit hours in the K-State General Education Program. Some of these credit hours may be in the student's major; however, because the intent of K-State 8 is for students to explore the perspectives of disciplines that may be quite different from those of their own majors, at least nine (9) credit hours in the K-State 8 must be represented by tagged credit-bearing courses/experiences outside the student's major.

In the interest of promoting a breadth of study, no one course/experience may satisfy more than one K-State 8 area for an individual student. Therefore, while courses/experiences may be tagged with up to two (2) K-State 8 areas, a student must indicate which one (1) of those areas a double-tagged course/experience will satisfy.

Changing Majors, Adding/Removing Minors or Changing Programs of Study
When students change majors, they will work with their advisors to review their K-State 8 credits. The application of credits for K-State 8 areas may be altered to meet the requirement that at least nine (9) credits be taken out of the major and to grant the student credit for courses that can be used to complete the K-State 8 in the new major.

Transfer credits
Transfer students will be required to cover all eight (8) of the K-State 8 areas.

When Kansas State University has an articulation agreement with a transfer institution, we suggest relying on that agreement to determine which K-State 8 area(s) transfer credit(s) could cover. For example, when a K-State course is tagged for a given area, then the "equivalent" course from another institution would be tagged for the same area. When there is not an articulation agreement with the transfer institution, the student's dean's office, in consultation with the office overseeing general education, will work with the student to determine which area(s) transfer credit(s) could cover.

The office overseeing general education must develop a mechanism for tracking and documenting which transfer courses are accepted for which K-State 8 areas across the university. It is imperative to ensure that these decisions are made systematically and uniformly across programs/departments, and this information should be made available on a website for students and advisors at K-State and at transfer institutions.

Overlap of K-State 8 and UGE General Education Programs
Regardless of when a new general education program is implemented, we must accommodate students in both the new K-State 8 program and the current UGE program for about 3-4 years. Students who began their programs of study at Kansas State University under the UGE system may complete their degrees with UGE requirements or may choose to move to the K-State 8 program. An implementation policy must state that students who begin their study at Kansas State University on or after a designated date will meet the requirements of the K-State 8 program.

Leadership
We recommend that the university designate an administrative position to lead and administer general education. Responsibilities should include: oversight of the course/experience tagging process and outcome, availability of courses/experiences within all K-State 8 areas, assessment of student learning, evaluation of the K-State 8 program, application of transfer credits for K-State 8, etc. We recommend that resources be allocated to fund the administrator position and to support this full range of responsibilities.

Assessment

The Task Force recognizes that K-State must design an assessment program in conjunction with and to complement other assessment programs already in place or underway in the departments and colleges. We want to avoid duplicating efforts or complicating current assessment processes. The design of an assessment program must be flexible to accommodate the needs and resources of different departments and colleges. The assessment program should incorporate multiple measures. A meaningful assessment strategy should involve both direct and indirect measures including both actual student performance and student self-reflection about their learning.

This proposal does not present a fully developed assessment program for general education. The Task Force believes that the general education assessment plan must be designed and implemented by faculty from across disciplines with the involvement of many people within the University community – beginning immediately upon approval of a new general education program.

The Task Force does want to offer a strong recommendation – general education outcomes could be assessed within capstone experiences in degree programs. Ideally, each degree program would have a final, culminating capstone experience, tailored to its curriculum and discipline. A capstone experience may be offered in the form of a course, a project within a course, or an independent study. It may be concurrent with an internship or a project conducted outside the classroom. While not all majors at Kansas State University offer a common capstone experience for their graduating seniors, a majority of our degree programs do.

A major focus of a capstone experience is to give students the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to *gather, integrate, and appropriately apply* their learning from other disciplinary perspectives (general education, distribution requirements, and other elective courses) with their learning in the major. The skills of critical thinking and communication play a critical role in a student's capstone experience. Best practices for the comprehensive assessment of such integrated learning are being developed across higher education with the greatest challenges for large enrollment institutions like ours. We recommend participation in this national initiative.

Appendix: The K-State 8 Area Descriptions

Aesthetic Experience and Interpretive Understanding

Courses and experiences in aesthetic experience and interpretive understanding provide students with the opportunity to develop their interpretive skills and heighten their aesthetic responses to literature, the performing arts, and the visual arts. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- analyze, interpret, and respond to literary texts, artistic performances, and works of art by drawing on differing historical, cultural, or theoretical perspectives;
- develop critical thinking skills, including their ability to reflect on and explain the meanings of artistic works, performances, and texts; and
- understand how artistic works shape and reproduce social ideas, values, and concerns and how they interact with and influence society, history, and culture.

Rationale: The arts provide us with something more than knowledge of traditions, beliefs, and forms of expression; they also teach us to observe carefully, to reflect, to appreciate, to wonder, and to see objects and interactions with new eyes. The study of artistic works can heighten curiosity, intensify aesthetic and observational capacities, and sharpen the ability to make sense of a range of works from sacred texts to contemporary popular music, from ancient architecture to television and film. An understanding of artistic and cultural traditions is an important component of preparing for a lifetime of civic and cultural engagement.

Empirical and Quantitative Reasoning

Courses and experiences in empirical and quantitative reasoning provide students with the opportunity to learn how to gather and evaluate information, weigh alternative evidence, understand the likelihood of particular outcomes, and recognize when available evidence is inadequate to draw a conclusion. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- understand and describe the importance of logical and empirical methods to determine and express relationships between properties or concepts;
- apply basic skills and knowledge using appropriate methods for gathering, analyzing and displaying data to draw conclusions; and
- solve complex, real-world problems through the application of appropriate strategies and the use of logical reasoning skills.

Rationale: All individuals are faced with the inevitable task of evaluating available information in order to make decisions. These decisions range from choices that are personal (e.g., whether or not to undergo particular medical treatments) to those that affect the community or society (e.g., evaluating data to make policy recommendations). The ability to examine and describe relationships among concepts and ideas using logical reasoning (based on observed, intuitive, scientific, theoretical and other forms of data) allows individuals to solve problems across a variety of situations.

Ethical Reasoning and Responsibility

Courses and experiences in ethical reasoning and responsibility should assist students in learning how to think through ethical dilemmas and make sound decisions when facing real-life situations. Ethical reasoning requires the study of standards by which human behavior and interactions can be considered right or wrong – defining the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, and how we make these determinations. Ethical responsibility includes the ability to apply ethical standards to social and environmental issues. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- exhibit basic awareness and understanding of ethical dilemmas and standards for resolution of ethical questions;
- apply emerging skills to address ethical dilemmas using sound principles and strategies; and
- recognize and articulate the importance of social and environmental responsibility as an essential component of ethical reasoning.

Rationale: Students must be exposed to a variety of ethical perspectives and multiple ways of resolving ethical dilemmas in order to be responsible citizens. Because humans exist within social groups and live within the natural and built environment, ethical decisions must include consideration of others and their surroundings. Therefore, social and environmental engagement and responsibility is the context in which ethical reasoning occurs. Educated citizens should be able to discern and reflect upon the broader impact of their individual actions.

Global Community

Courses and experiences in global community will introduce students to values, perspectives, beliefs, behaviors, policies and customs from around the world. Emphasis should be placed on exploring the interdependence of people, nations and systems across the globe. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- examine their own cultural context using a comparative global perspective;
- exhibit an understanding of global issues, trends, policies, processes, impacts and systems; and
- think critically about issues such as globalization, sustainability, multiculturalism, political and governmental context, privilege, difference/similarity, prejudice and discrimination within a global context.

Rationale: A global perspective is imperative for K-State graduates who will continue to live and work within a global community throughout their lives. Current global challenges are of great importance and affect all individuals, political systems and nations, regardless of minority/majority status or group identity. Current challenges include: economic globalization, sustainability, global health priorities, environmental crises, ethnic and cultural identity and global matters of conflict resolution, justice and equity.

Historical Perspectives

Courses and experiences examining historical perspectives help students realize the need to understand the past and thoughtfully consider the future to contextualize current knowledge, to glimpse how it may continue to develop and to examine the role they might play. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- Understand how past events and actions have influenced or affected current events, scholarly knowledge, and societies;
- Understand that knowledge is not fixed and that human beings continue to reinterpret the past based on current perspectives; and
- Identify and describe appropriate systematic and scientific strategies to examine history.

Rationale: Educated individuals realize that the world in which we live changes. Being able to trace current knowledge to its sources provides insight into what we know and how we came to know it. A sense of history enables us to use the lessons of the past as touchstones against which we compare our accomplishments. Appreciating that knowledge is constantly evolving means that people can prepare for the future, develop contingencies, be alert to trends, understand their origins, and acquire the skills and resources required to redirect or modify those trends as needed.

Human Diversity within the U.S.

Courses and experiences in human diversity within the U.S. should assist students in developing an awareness of self and others through scholarly study, research and personal interaction. Students should be exposed to multiple perspectives about U.S. society and how group affiliation affects people's perceptions and experiences. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- identify and discuss diverse perspectives and experiences as they examine U.S. institutions, practices, policies and influences from contemporary and/or historical viewpoints;
- exhibit knowledge and understanding of a variety of cultures in the U.S., including majority and non-majority groups, and their interconnectedness within U.S. society; and
- think critically about issues such as identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, multiculturalism, similarity/difference, prejudice and discrimination within a U.S. social and cultural context.

Rationale: Within the diverse and pluralistic U.S. society, through interactions with each other, individuals often categorize people in terms of inclusion or exclusion from particular groups. To reduce false or unsubstantiated opinions or assumptions they have of "others" and of themselves, students must examine the many patterns that characterize human groupings in U.S. culture – for example, those based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, (dis)ability, and socioeconomic class.

Natural and Physical Sciences

Courses and experiences in natural and physical sciences introduce students to the central facts, ideas and theories related to the study of living systems and the physical universe and help them develop the ability to evaluate the merit of scientific and technological claims. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- understand major concepts and facts related to the study of living systems and the physical universe;
- apply scientific facts and ideas to real-world problems; and
- develop a beginning understanding of social, practical, and ethical significance of scientific knowledge and theory as well as their applications through technology.

Rationale: Scientific advances affect our lives in powerful ways, from the development of medical advances that extend the quality and length of human life to the creation of new energy sources that reduce pollution. Students must learn our current understanding of the natural and physical sciences. Students also should understand that views of the natural and physical world change with developments in science and experimental technologies. An undergraduate education should ask that students examine the relationship of science to society, to historical developments, to our understanding of truth, to ethical dilemmas, to creativity and innovation, to broad implications and sustainability and to understandings of the meaning of life and the cosmos.

Social Sciences

Courses and experiences in social sciences emphasize how individuals, families, groups, institutions, governments and societies behave and influence one another and the natural environment. Students are exposed to appropriate methods used to analyze and understand interactions of various social factors that influence behavior at these multiple levels. For example, courses and experiences in this area could facilitate students learning to:

- explore ways in which individuals, groups, institutions, governments and/or societies behave and influence one another;
- exhibit an understanding of the various social factors that influence behavior at multiple levels of human interaction; and
- identify and describe appropriate systematic and scientific strategies to examine current social issues and problems.

Rationale: Educated individuals can identify the difference between rigorous, systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena. The reciprocal relationships between human behavior and social environments must be examined in order to responsibly encourage behaviors that will maintain and/or achieve health and well-being for individuals, families, groups, societies, nations and the global community.