

CAT Community Expansion: Request for Proposals for 2017

Proposal Deadline: August 24, 2016 | Proposals should be submitted to: kstatefirst@k-state.edu

Introduction and Purpose

The CAT Community program will continue to expand in the fall of 2017. The goal is to open about 40 CAT Communities designed to serve a range of first-year students.

The CAT (Connecting Across Topics) Communities are learning communities that allow students with shared interests to enroll in a cluster of classes together. Led by a faculty member, these learning communities allow students to learn about the connections among courses, and they help students with their transition to college-level learning and college-life. CAT Communities emphasize learning inside the classroom but also outside the classroom in the form of co-curricular events, study groups, and other activities and events (planned by involved faculty and staff) that connect students to each other. Each CAT community includes the support of a Learning Assistant, an undergraduate peer mentor who has been successful in the same courses and can assist with the class and with questions about college life. Students in the Residential CAT Communities also live together in the same residence hall. For more information, please see the CAT Community program website: <http://www.k-state.edu/cat/>.

Research nationally and at K-State indicates a significant positive correlation between learning community participation and retention rates, graduation rates, and academic performance. Known benefits to students also include making friends more quickly, pursuing and finding academic assistance more readily, connecting to resources more easily, and experiencing a large university as though it were much smaller. Well-designed and well-executed learning communities generate these positive results because they focus on creating an environment for students that eases the transition to college and lays a foundation for success.

Eligibility

Faculty and/or staff in any college, department, or unit at Kansas State University are eligible to submit a proposal. Proposals demonstrating an interdisciplinary collaboration/approach are especially welcome. The proposed CAT Community must have an academic component and an identifiable "home" unit or faculty leader who oversees the design, operation, and success of the learning community.

Structure and Design of CAT Communities

CAT Community Definition

Learning Communities have a variety of definitions, and many different models exist. At K-State, the CAT Communities have typically been defined as a group of 20-25 first-year students who:

- Take two or more courses together along with a one-hour connections course,
- Share a common academic interest
- Take part together in related co-curricular events
- Learn from both a faculty member who is the leader of the CAT Community and an undergraduate peer mentor or Learning Assistant
- And, in the case of the Residential CAT Communities, live together in the same residence hall

The CAT Communities also all share four overarching Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): critical thinking, communication, community building, and application of learning.

We welcome proposals that may modify this design -- to expand the size, for example, or to propose a sophomore CAT Community. While we are open to thoughtful proposals that may depart from the current definition of a CAT Community, we also know that learning communities work best when they include an academic component, an intentional design, a co-curricular or out of class component, opportunities for student connections and student-faculty connections, and meaningful faculty involvement.

Role Responsibilities

K-State First and the Department of Housing and Dining Services will:

- Market and publicize all CAT Communities for recruitment purposes
- Place and notify students
- Coordinate course space with the participating departments and units
- Enroll students in the CAT Community-affiliated courses
- Assign residential space for Residential CAT Communities
- Provide appropriate logistical support for planning
- Provide co-curricular event assistance, including a modest amount of funding for co-curricular events (usually about \$200-250 per CAT Community)
- Provide faculty development
- Provide training and support for undergraduate learning assistants

CAT Communities Leaders / Faculty Members will:

- Complete a CAT Community Proposal Form
- Nominate an undergraduate to serve as the Learning Assistant
- Prepare a syllabus for the one-hour connections course that includes an attendance policy and learning outcomes aligned with the program's four overarching SLOs
- Emphasize active learning pedagogies in the one-hour connections course
- Make participation in the common reading program a part of your CAT Community
- Attend professional developments workshops, including a required information meeting in May and an orientation in August
- Plan relevant co-curricular events for your students
- Facilitate and foster social and curricular connections for students
- Participate in K-State First's common assessment process for first-year students

Compensation

Faculty members leading a CAT Community will receive professional development funds in an amount ranging from \$1,500-\$1,700. (Faculty at higher ranks and faculty with CAT Community experience will receive the modestly higher stipends.) The funds can be distributed as salary, though taxes and other payroll expenses will be deducted.

Learning Assistants will receive a stipend of \$500 for the fall semester as well as room and board for the academic year.

Design Parameters

Academic Components. A CAT Community must have an academic course component. Typically, the CAT Communities have been designed around two general education courses plus a one-hour connections class.

Leader. While CAT Communities often involve various members of the K-State faculty and staff, each one has an identifiable leader or pair of co-leaders. The CAT Community leader teaches the one-hour connections course and designs and directs the learning community in general.

Eligible or Ideal Students. A CAT Community should have an identifiable population of eligible or ideal students. These student populations may be identified by professional goals, majors or minors, programs or departments, specific academic or area interests, or specific college goals and interests (such as studying abroad, service learning, or finding a major).

Size. K-State CAT Communities have typically been groups of about 20 or so. If a proposed CAT Community is envisioned to be larger, it may be possible to create two or more sections of the proposed CAT Community in order to facilitate personal connections and active learning.

Interdisciplinary Focus. CAT Communities are often an opportunity for students and instructors to make connections across disciplinary topics, and efforts to connect elements of individual courses into a larger and related whole are important. Such connections happen through the assignments, activities, and discussions in the connections course as well as the outside-of-class co-curricular events.

College Student Success. K-State First takes a holistic approach to student success, believing that supportive learning environments help students thrive academically and adjust successfully to the challenges of college-level learning and college life. Thus, the CAT Communities are venues where students can learn and practice a variety of college success strategies from managing time effectively to selecting appropriate professional goals that give one a sense of meaning and purpose. A place to build academic and social support networks, CAT Communities can also be an opportunity to reflect on, discuss, and learn more about the skills and perspectives that enable students to find success in college and after graduation.

Instructor Involvement. CAT Communities succeed because of the dedicated involvement of faculty members and Learning Assistants who interact with the students in class and plan the co-curricular events that happen outside of class. We expect CAT Community faculty and LA's to participate actively in the connections class and at the scheduled co-curricular events.

Co-Curricular Events. CAT Communities include a minimum of three co-curricular events during the semester, though some CAT Communities schedule many more events. We encourage all K-State First classes and communities to be a part of a program-wide event each fall, and we expect that CAT Community leaders will want at least one or two events to be specific to their own CAT Community. Beyond these general guidelines, CAT Communities have made use of a wide range of co-curricular events, including field trips, KSBN-related activities, tours of labs, visits to museums, trips to community-related research facilities, fine arts performances, concerts, review and study groups, lectures, film screenings, service and service learning activities, excursions to the challenge course or to the Konza Prairie, community building or social events, activities that complement the curriculum (a poetry reading for a literature-based CAT Community, for instance), themed lunches or dinners, and much more. We encourage CAT Community leaders to be creative and to make use of the multitude of events and resources available on campus, many available at no cost.

Recruitment. With the help of advisors, Housing and Dining, and New Student Services, K-State First will actively market and recruit new students for all CAT Communities. Nevertheless, the ideas and plans of CAT Community leaders and sponsoring units can be vitally important to these efforts. Thus, we would value specific suggestions about how CAT Community leaders and sponsoring units can complement or collaboratively support K-State First's marketing and recruitment plans. Snappy names for CAT Communities often help the recruitment process.

Proposal and Submission Process

The proposal form may be found below. Examples of a completed proposal form are available from Gregory Eiselein or the CAT Community website: <http://www.k-state.edu/cat/> . The deadline for receipt of proposals is **5:00 p.m., Wednesday, August 24th**. Proposals should be submitted electronically to kstatefirst@k-state.edu . For answers to questions or for more information about proposal preparation and submission, please contact:

Gregory Eiselein
Director, K-State First
008 Leasure Hall
eiselei@k-state.edu
(785) 532-1501

Review Process and Status Notification

The CAT Community design parameters listed above will serve as the review criteria. A successful and viable proposal will demonstrate consideration of each parameter and address each with creativity and concrete details.

Review of and response to submissions will occur on a rolling basis. You may be contacted to provide additional or clarifying material.

CAT Community Proposal Form
K-State First
Fall 2017

CAT Communities are designed to foster intellectual and social interaction among students, their peers, and their instructors. They promote learning across disciplinary boundaries and integration of ideas. CAT Communities promote active and collaborative learning, and they help instructors and students create a rich, supportive, learner-centered environment.

CAT Community Leader(s) _____

Department _____

Email _____

Telephone _____

CAT Community Name _____

CAT Community Size _____

Sponsoring Unit (College/Department/Program) _____

CAT Community Course Cluster. Please list anticipated courses in the space below.

Theme. Please describe the theme or focus of your CAT Community.

Rationale. How will the individual courses integrate the theme/focus for this learning community? Please explain briefly the rationale for this combination of courses as well the pedagogical strategies you could use to explore the learning community's central theme.

Eligible or Ideal Students. Who would be the ideal student population for this CAT Community? Who would be eligible to enroll?

Recruitment. Please outline any ideas you or your unit may have about actively recruiting students for your CAT Community.

Co-Curricular Activity Planning. Please describe the out-of-class activities or co-curricular events you would make a part of your CAT Community. It is understood that these plans are largely tentative at this point. For suggestions, please see the discussion of "Co-Curricular Events" in the "Design Parameters" section of the RFP.