



**K-STATE FIRST**

**CAT Community Program  
Faculty Guide**

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**K-STATE**



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# Chapter 1: An Introduction to K-State First

## K-State First Mission

K-State First is an integrated effort to create an outstanding university experience for every first-year student at Kansas State University. The program provides new students with a transition to college-level learning and college life in four important ways:

- By fostering campus community and feelings of belonging.
- By offering opportunities for diverse activities and interactions.
- By raising academic expectations with engagement and compassion.
- By empowering students with a strong sense of personal responsibility and social agency.

Bringing together exciting small classes taught by exceptional faculty with a vibrant student life experience, K-State First helps students establish the foundation for a successful college career.



We know that the first year of college is a big deal for our incoming students. A positive transition to university-level learning and the college experience in general can set students on the path to academic success and degree attainment, as well as satisfaction and achievement in their careers and personal lives. The first year is also the place where students are most likely to encounter obstacles that could deter them from the learning and degree they seek.

## Core Programs

K-State First has four core programs for first-year students:

- Connecting Across Topics (CAT) Communities
- First-Year Seminars (FYS)
- Guide to Personal Success (GPS)
- K-State Book Network (KSBN)

K-State First is also an advocate for first-year students and an important source for connection and communication among the various programs and opportunities for incoming students.

### *CAT Communities*

Designed around students' academic interests, these learning communities allow first-year students to meet friends and work with experienced faculty in a specialized area of study. The same 22 students are enrolled in two general education classes together and a one-hour connections class.

### *FYS*

A small group of 22 students fulfill a general education requirement while making the academic and social transition to college life.

### *GPS*

A mentoring program, GPS matches a first-year student with a faculty member, staff member or graduate student to serve as a professional point of reference throughout the student's first year.

### *KSBN*

An all-university reading program that selects a common read for the academic year, KSBN connects all first-year students at K-State. It provides incoming students with a shared academic experience that helps open the conversation with professors, staff, administrators and other students.

## History

In 2008, we piloted a first-year experience model by offering First-Year Seminars, small classes designed to help first-year students adjust to university life and expectations. In 2009, we introduced our mentoring program, GPS, by pairing incoming students with faculty and staff. We officially launched K-State First in 2010, introducing KSBN and CAT Communities as well. K-State First expanded again in 2016 by adding First-Year Seminar sections of University Experience and creating the Student Success CAT Communities.

## Chapter 2: Purpose of CAT Communities

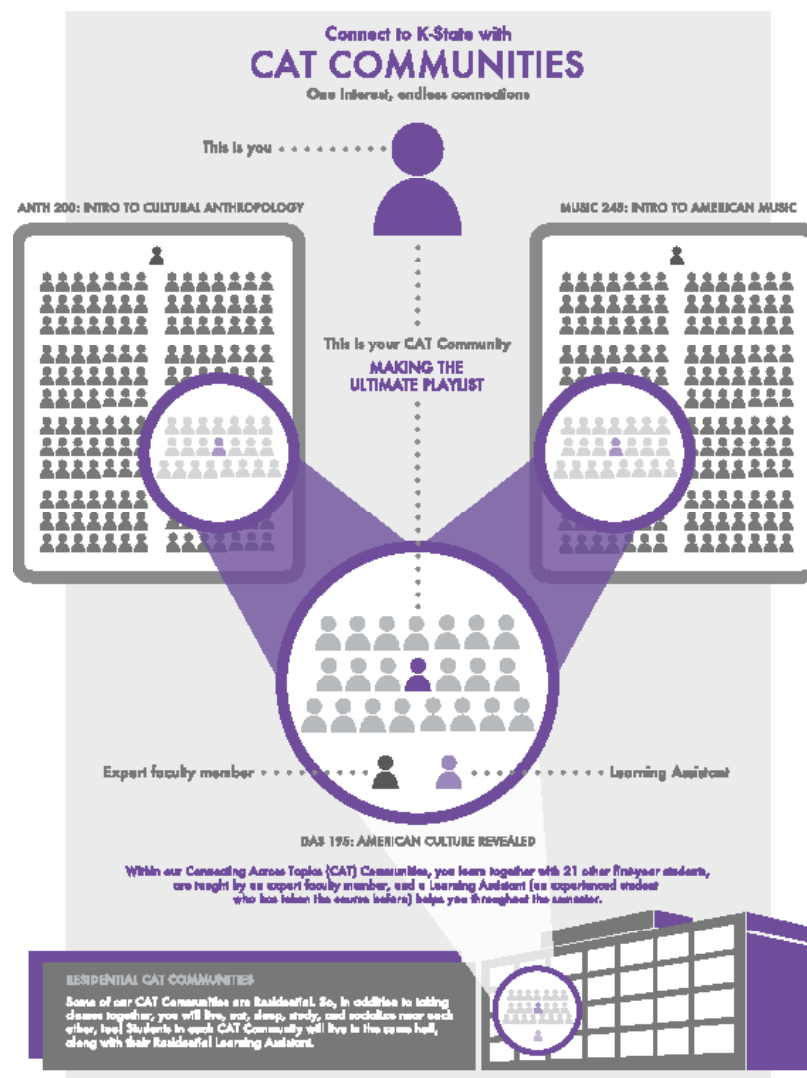
### Who We Are

Connecting Across Topics (CAT) Communities are learning communities specifically designed for first-year students. We believe these communities are an excellent way for students to connect with other students and faculty from the beginning of their K-State experience.

CAT Communities are designed around student interests, and they offer mentoring from a professor and an advanced undergraduate Learning Assistant who shares the students' interests. Students may also enroll in residential or study abroad communities, which offer extended learning opportunities outside the classroom.

### How They Work

A group of 22 students enroll in two general education courses and one connections course together during the fall semester. The two main courses count toward graduation in most programs, and the friendly faces in the CAT Community make the larger, mostly lecture-based classes feel a lot smaller. Once a week, students meet in a connections course with this core group of classmates and a professor or professors with similar academic interests to help students apply what they have been learning. An undergraduate student, called a Learning Assistant (LA), who has been successful in the same courses, will assist with the class and answer questions about college life, learning and activities.



## CAT Community Philosophy

The CAT Community class enrolls only first-year students at K-State. CAT Communities are based on the following six elements, which make up our core identity:

### Interdisciplinary academic content

Each CAT Community is comprised of graded, academic classes. The content is also distinctively interdisciplinary, as it is shaped by the other courses in the community. The most important goal of these courses is to provide fundamental support to K-State's academic mission and its focus on student learning. Included in this mission is an effort to support student learning beyond the first year, so we encourage faculty to also emphasize such college success strategies as study skills, test-taking strategies and time management as part of their academic curriculum.

### Beyond the academic

As they support student learning inside the classroom, CAT Communities also create experiences for students outside of the classroom. Students and faculty are encouraged to attend K-State First events, such as the K-State Book Network programwide event or other campus events. Faculty also embed within their course co-curricular experiences specifically for their CAT Community students. For example, you might take your students on a field trip or ask that your Learning Assistant organize a study group.

### Common elements

CAT Communities are connected to each other as part of the larger K-State First Program. All courses are designed to introduce students to the academic standards of college-level work and the university's undergraduate student learning outcomes. The courses emphasize critical thinking, communication, community building and the application of learning. They also provide students with the opportunity to engage in co-curricular activities.

### High-quality instruction

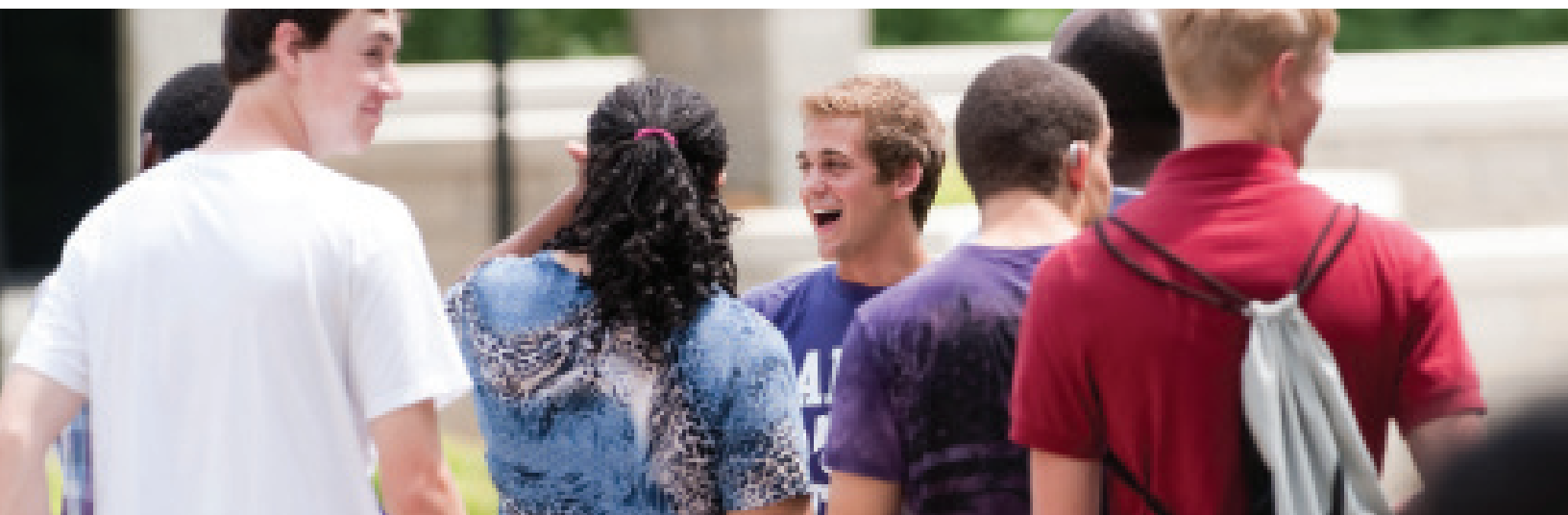
The CAT Community Program has a strong, skilled and dedicated faculty. These faculty members are part of a team of instructors who are coordinated at the university level and work with each other to plan, design, teach and assess the K-State First Program. These instructors, drawn from all over campus, are pedagogically excellent, experienced and interested in undergraduate education at K-State. They are among the best instructors at the university.

### Active learning

With their small size and community focus, the CAT Communities invite and encourage an active learning environment. The courses devote significant portions of class time to hands-on learning, group discussions, problem solving, inquiry-based learning and activities that provide students with opportunities to develop their critical thinking and communication skills. CAT Communities are also academic spaces that encourage students to collaborate, interact and develop relationships with their peers and professors.

### Peer mentoring

Each CAT Community benefits from the presence of an undergraduate peer mentor. As a fellow student who is acquainted with college life, the LA serves as both a social and academic support for students in the CAT Community. LAs complete a peer mentoring training program, attend the one-hour CAT Community course and facilitate students' transition to college life.



## Student Learning Outcomes

All K-State First CAT Communities share four basic student learning outcomes (SLOs): critical thinking, communication, community building and application of learning. Our programwide SLOs (listed below) should appear on your CAT Community syllabus. You may tailor them to fit your particular academic content or goals for the course.

Upon successful completion of a CAT Community, students will be able to:

### Think critically

Identify interdisciplinary connections between two courses and explain their overlapping thematic questions or issues.

### Communicate effectively

Express their own understandings of course content in respectful dialogue with others and with engagement, imagination and self-reflection.

### Build community

Interact effectively with faculty and peers both inside and outside of the classroom.

### Apply learning

Use the skills and knowledge learned in the class to solve new problems, answer questions, or identify areas for further investigation.

### Assessing SLOs

All K-State First faculty are encouraged to participate in our programwide SLO assessment during the fall semester.

Assessment methods may vary between courses, and further information can be found on the K-State Online Faculty site.

Results will be combined with all other courses assessing the same outcome to create an aggregate report of student learning for each SLO.

## Common Components for All CAT Communities

1. Syllabus including common SLOs
2. An attendance policy
3. Regular use of active learning pedagogies
4. Participation in common reading program (KSBN)
5. Attendance at co-curricular events





## Types of CAT Communities

Although all CAT Communities share a similar identity and common elements, K-State First offers four different types of CAT Communities for first-year students:

### Residential CAT Communities

Residential CAT communities provide an added opportunity for first-year students to connect with others who share their academic interests by placing them in the same on-campus residence hall. Like our other CAT Communities, about 22 first-year students take a group of classes together, but they live, eat, sleep, study and socialize near each other, too! Students in each CAT Community will live in the same hall, along with their Residential Learning Assistant.

### Non- Residential CAT Communities

A group of 22 students enroll in two regular courses taken together and another one-hour opportunity to discover course connections. Students learn together, are taught by an expert faculty member, and a Learning Assistant helps throughout the semester. Some CAT Communities are organized around student interest, which allow students to explore an interdisciplinary area of study while working with an expert professor and undergraduate learning assistant who share similar interests. Other CAT Communities offer discipline specific topics, and these preprofessional CAT Communities allow students with the same major and/or career interest to take courses in their field of study while working with a professor and undergraduate learning assistant in their same discipline.

### Study Abroad CAT Communities

Study Abroad CAT Communities provide a dynamic, global learning experience for K-State students from the start of their college experience. Like our other CAT Communities, students take a group of academic classes together during the fall semester, but they also have the chance to travel abroad for an international service-learning opportunity.

### Student Success CAT Communities

Student Success CAT Communities engage first-year students with a diverse community of goal-oriented peers, facilitate individual academic guidance, and assist students in developing a strong educational foundation. These CAT Communities foster independent learning, build community and inspire engagement, develop multicultural competencies, and provide students with the tools and skills needed to succeed in college. Within the courses, there is an emphasis on college student success skills such as time management, study skills, critical thinking strategies, etc. They provide a place to ask questions about the university and practice the skills needed to succeed as a first-year student.



# Chapter 3: Thinking About the Classroom

## Best Practices

As no two CAT Community courses are the same, we cannot provide a step-by-step guide that delineates exactly how you should conduct your CAT Community. However, we can offer a list of practices that have worked well.

In general, a CAT Community classroom should invite first-year students into the university community while engaging them academically and socially. To accomplish these goals, we suggest the following strategies:

### Encourage active learning

- Host lively discussions.
- Arrange field trips.
- Engage students in research.

### Challenge students, but offer support

- Hold high expectations.
- Help students reach realistic learning goals.
- Encourage risk-taking but offer clear feedback.

### Take a holistic approach to student success

- Understand that students have lives apart from the classroom.
- Develop opportunities for both cognitive and social development.
- Create an environment for students to mutually support one another.

Although these ideas are specifically geared toward your CAT Community Connections class, many of the same ideas apply to the other courses in the learning community.

## Specific Ideas for the CAT Connections Class

1. Connect your class with the academic content of the other courses or with the (preprofessional) field around which your CAT Community is built. CAT Communities are powerful when the learning from each class connects with and reinforces the learning from the other courses.
2. Infuse your class with student success ideas, lessons and practices that will help your students acquire the skills and the knowledge they need to succeed in your course and your discipline.
  - Learning faculty expectations.
  - Understanding and celebrating diversity.
  - Discovering our Strengths.
  - Learning to think critically.
  - Engaging with readings.
  - Understanding writing practices and process.
3. Develop a good working relationship with your Learning Assistant. (See Chapter 4: Working with a Learning Assistant)
4. Do something with your students early in the semester. Get some coursework from them early and give them some feedback right away. The first three weeks can be crucial.

## Collaborating With Other Instructors in the CAT Community

Generally, we refer to the CAT Community Connections course professor as the lead instructor of the CAT Community, while the supporting instructor teaches one of the other courses in the community. There are a variety of ways the lead instructor and supporting instructor can interact. Sometimes, both instructors elect to team-teach the connections course, sometimes the connections class is clearly led by the lead instructor but the supporting instructor plays an active role, and sometimes the lead instructor takes primary responsibility and simply exchanges syllabi with the supporting instructor. All of these models can work. We encourage you to collaborate with your supporting instructor in a way that best fits the needs of your particular CAT Community.

## Planning a Co-Curricular Event or Field Trip

Co-Curricular events are a great way to get students engaged in their community and practice their skills. Consider taking them to the Beach Museum of Art or an off-campus site within the state. Funding is available to help pay for the cost of a Co-Curricular event. Funding request forms are available on our website at [www.k-state.edu/first/resources](http://www.k-state.edu/first/resources).

### General Guidelines

For our K-State First CAT Communities and First-Year Seminars, our program requires a minimum of three outside of the classroom co-curricular events. These can range from short field trips to local businesses, theatre performances, lectures, athletic games, or exhibits and tours.

One of these events should connect to the KSBN common book of the year. Often KSBN will bring the author and provide a large campuswide event for all of our classes, but there is also typically a series of faculty/staff lectures and other events related to the book that could be used as well.

One of these events should have a focus on diversity/inclusion as a way to enhance students' understanding of their identities and to prepare them to work with a diverse group of peers at the university and in their future careers. This will help to build students' cultural competency skills and further engage with the intercultural learning initiatives happening across the university. Depending on the common read for the year, that event might also overlap with this category as well.

We also recommend that one event have a more specific focus on building the community within your class. Hiking the Konza, escape room puzzling, Challenge Course adventures, attending athletic events, or even something simple like a bowling night gives students the chance to get to know each other better and build up their communication and collaboration skills.

### Co-Curricular Reflection

One of the most powerful learning components of the co-curricular events happens when students are given the opportunity to reflect on the experience together. You can create an assignment with three or four reflection questions to gauge the impact on each student individually, and also set aside some class time to discuss their thoughts about the event and connect it more fully to your class outcomes and goals. This integration of the co-curricular event outcomes will help students build a bridge between their academics and lived experiences.

### Scheduling

To make sure the majority of your students are able to attend all three events and to provide us the necessary time for scheduling and reservations, we recommend that you plan your co-curricular events as you prep your course and include them in your syllabus. This gives your students the chance to get the events scheduled into their calendars right away, and if there is a time conflict you can work together to plan a make-up activity with them.

## Funding

K-State First is typically able to fund one co-curricular event per class at about \$10 per student. Our funds are limited, so this funding is offered on a first come, first served basis. If you plan on taking your class to an event that costs money, we recommend you fill out our field trip funding form at the beginning of the semester. Also, please keep in mind that food is not an allowable expense.

K-State First is often able to leverage our campus and community connections to find discounts and expedite reservations. We will need at least two weeks' notice before the event as this will allow us to do things like buy a packet of tickets for an event, reserve a van for travel, or schedule a tour or visit at a facility. Please call our office at 785-532-1501 or email [kstatefirst@k-state.edu](mailto:kstatefirst@k-state.edu) to work directly with our office on scheduling, funding and logistics for your co-curricular events.

## Using the KSBN Book

The K-State Book Network (KSBN) is designed to provide a common experience to help first-year students transition from high school to college, grow academically and socially, and share something with all other first-year students. How you integrate the book into your course is entirely up to you. The events that go along with the books are geared to help students bond over their common reading experience, and learn new things about the book, related themes, K-State and the Manhattan community. It can be a great way for first-year students to find common ground and start a conversation both inside and outside the classroom.

Whether you want your students to read the entirety of the novel or have specific sections you want to cover, we recommend including that in your syllabus and tying an assignment or class discussion to the book. If you want to explore specific themes but feel unprepared to cover the content or to lead the conversation, a member of the KSBN committee or campus partner can visit your class to help with the facilitation. Tying one of your co-curricular events to the KSBN book also works if you are unable to integrate the book into the course itself. For more specific suggestions, ideas, discussion questions, or activities, please check out the KSBN teaching and resource guide at [k-state.edu/first/resources](http://k-state.edu/first/resources).





## Creating Community and Engaging Students

Research demonstrates that students learn best in an environment where they feel connected with those around them and are asked to become co-constructors of their learning through active classroom engagement. Here are some ideas for creating classroom community and designing active learning experiences.

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves” - From *Seven Principles for Good Principles in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)

**Consider seating arrangements:** When possible, have your students sit in a circle or a horseshoe arrangement. These types of arrangements promote face-to-face interaction among students and enhance student-teacher interactions. These arrangements also ensure that every student sits on the front row of the class, which makes them more likely to participate in the learning.

**Structure lessons to promote engagement:** Start with something at the beginning of the lesson to intrigue students about the day’s content. Interweave content with challenging activities or opportunities for engagement. End with a review of the material as a way to help students draw connections with what they have learned.

**Be a coach for your students:** Let them know that you want them to succeed and that you are there to help them reach their college goals.

**Teach students how to be successful in your class:** Share openly with students the keys to doing well in your class and then let them know that you’ll be there to teach them these skills. For example, if paper assignments are a significant part of their grade, teach your students how to write the papers you have assigned. Break down for them each step of the process, and show them how to write the kind of paper your course is asking them to write. If problem-solving is key, teach them how to figure out the type of problems you’ll be asking them to tackle. If essay questions play a prominent role on your examinations, teach your students how to write excellent exam essays. And so on.

**Incorporate activities that are both hands-on and minds-on:** Classroom activities are not just a way of entertaining students or keeping them awake – they are excellent teaching methods to keep students challenged and engaged. There are countless types of activities or projects that can be effective, but below are a few simple ideas to get you started:

- **Journal or reflective writing:** Give students a question or writing prompt related to the day’s topic, and ask them to write down their initial thoughts in one or two minutes. This can be used to kick off a class discussion, or as time for students to review something they have learned.



- **Think-pair-share:** This is a simple, easy way of inviting discussion. Present a question or discussion topic. Give students a few seconds to formulate their own answer, then have them turn to a partner and discuss their thoughts. You can then have students share their ideas with the rest of the class or use their pair-share discussion as the foundation for your next activity or large group discussion.
- **Scenario-based learning:** Present students with a difficult real-world challenge, and ask them to apply theory or concepts learned in the course to determine a solution.
- **Minute speeches:** Distribute slips of paper to students. Each slip should contain one topic, such as a concept from an article they have read or a term they should review for an exam. Give students five minutes to prepare a one-minute speech on that topic. They can use their books or notes, or even work in partners if you choose. Then, have students share their mini-speeches with the class.
- **Illustrative quotes:** Bring in copies of an article (or any text) you would like students to discuss. Have students spend the first 10 minutes or so reading through the article and highlighting/underlining quotes that they especially agree with, disagree with, find interesting, or find particularly difficult to understand. Whether you discuss in groups or the whole class, students now have something to contribute. They can discuss/question/affirm the points they've underlined.
- **Inside-outside circles:** Divide students into two even groups. Have one group stand in a circle facing the outside of the classroom, and the other group stand in a circle facing the inside of the classroom. Everyone should have one person standing directly in front of them. Provide students with a discussion topic, either verbally or through a note card. They should discuss the topic with the person across from them for 30-60 seconds. Then ask the members of one circle to rotate one person to the left. Students can repeat the same activity only with a different partner or topic.

## Fostering a Diverse Learning Environment

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."  
— Audre Lorde

### What is Diversity?

How can we define diversity in a meaningful way, and how can we integrate it into our classrooms so we're not just checking off the "diversity" box?

Creating a space where all of our students are valued and celebrated is an essential component for an effective learning environment. This also allows us the chance to demonstrate to our students the value and importance of diverse perspectives to prepare them for the world outside of the university.



“On average, holding all other variables constant, students who perceived that the curriculum reflected diversity were more likely to perceive that the institution had achieved a positive climate for diversity” (Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2011, p. 525).<sup>1</sup>

“Indeed, one frequently hears faculty say, ‘I do not care what color my students are,’ presumably thinking the issue of race has been laid to rest. Telling a minority student that race doesn’t matter means little. Minority youth will identify forms of bias that people in the majority do not observe; they may, in fact, sometimes believe there is prejudice where none exists. But their feelings are, in the words of sociologist W. I. Thomas, ‘real in their consequences.’ These feelings and their consequences thus cannot be dismissed out of hand” (Tapia & Johnson, 2011, p. 487).<sup>2</sup>

Highlighted below are definitions for diversity, inclusion, equity and intercultural learning that many of your students might be familiar with. Explore and consider some of the ways these can be connected and incorporated to the work you do in and outside of the classroom at K-State:

- **Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term “diversity” is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives and values.<sup>3</sup>
- **Inclusion** is active, intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity — in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect — in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.<sup>4</sup>
- **Equity** is the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all.<sup>5</sup>
- **Intercultural learning** is about strengthening my awareness of myself, my awareness of others, and how I respond, behave and reflect when I am around people like me or different from me. Intercultural learning is not about changing who we are or what we value. It is about being able to work successfully in community with others who are different than us both in the classroom, professionally and personally.

## Why is Diversity and Inclusion Important for Me and My Students?

At K-State, the students, staff and faculty are your community. We all have different backgrounds, but we are working together with the common goal of furthering our education and continually engaging in critical thinking. This is an easier task when working respectfully with a group of people. Part of being an educated person is knowing about others and working effectively with people who are different from you — college is a great place for students to gain practice for their future professional work and place in diverse communities.

While the overall goal is to have communities that are equitable and allow us all to thrive in the world, engaging with diversity has direct positive effects on individuals as well. Much research has shown that there are many positive outcomes when diverse interactions are practiced throughout college.

<sup>1</sup> Mayhew, M. J., Grunwald, H. E., & Dey, E. L. (2011). Curriculum matters: Creating a positive climate for diversity from the student perspective. In S. R. Harper & S. Hurtado (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic diversity in higher education* (3rd ed., pp. 515–529). Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions.

<sup>2</sup> Tapia, R., & Johnson, C. (2011). Minority students in science and math: What universities still do not understand about race in America. In S. R. Harper & S. Hurtado (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic diversity in higher education* (3rd ed., pp. 484–491). Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions.

<sup>3</sup> UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, Glossary of Terms.

<sup>4</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). Making excellence inclusive. Retrieved from <http://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive>.

<sup>5</sup> Applied Research Center. (2009). Catalytic change: Lessons learned from the racial justice grantmaking assessment (PDF). Retrieved from [http://raciaequity.org/docs/Racial\\_justice\\_assessment\\_loresFINAL.pdf](http://raciaequity.org/docs/Racial_justice_assessment_loresFINAL.pdf).



Some of these benefits include **broadening interests and building social self-confidence** by adapting to unfamiliar social situations, **accelerating and deepening learning** by helping individuals to step outside of their comfort zone through interaction and collaboration with more people that are different, **strengthening critical thinking skills** by seeking out a variety of perspectives to see all sides of an issue, **stimulating creative thinking** by generating ideas with others who have diverse perspectives, and **enhancing career success** to prepare students for a global society where they can solve problems and collaborate with diverse co-workers, customers and clients.<sup>6</sup>

In a 2013 study, researchers found that frequent diversity interactions fostered considerable growth for individuals in their leadership skills, psychological well-being, intellectual engagement, and intercultural effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> Some of the specific ways that diversity and intercultural interactions can benefit students are highlighted below:

#### Leadership skills:

- Consciousness of self — awareness of values, emotions, and attitudes that motivate one to take action.
- Congruence — actions are consistent with one's most deeply held beliefs and convictions.
- Commitment — energy that motivates one to serve and drives the collective effort.
- Collaboration — working effectively with others in a common effort.
- Common purpose — working with shared goals and values to achieve the task at hand.
- Controversy with civility — recognition that viewpoint differences are inevitable and that these differences must be aired with respect.
- Citizenship — responsibility for and connections with the community and society.
- Change — ability to adapt to environments and situations that are constantly evolving.

#### Psychological well-being:

- Autonomy — sense of self-determination and independence.
- Environmental mastery — capacity to effectively manage one's life and surrounding world.
- Personal growth — sense of continued growth and development as a person.
- Positive relations with others — quality interpersonal relationships.
- Purpose in life — identifying and working toward a particular life purpose.
- Self-acceptance — positive evaluation of self and one's own attributes.

#### Intercultural effectiveness:

- Relativistic appreciation — cognizance of both similarities and differences across people and groups.
- Comfort with differences — level of comfort with diverse individuals.
- Diversity of contact — interest and intent to participate in diverse cultural and social activities.

## Creating an inclusive classroom environment

"I entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer ... education as the practice of freedom ... education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Learning is a place where paradise can be created."

— Bell Hooks

Kansas State University is committed to celebrating diversity and inclusion. This is emphasized in our Principles of Community.

Take a few minutes on your own to read through the principles, and answer the following questions:

1. What does this principle mean to you?
2. How can you integrate this into your classroom?

<sup>6</sup> Cuseo, J. & Thompson, A. (2015). *Humanity, Diversity & The Liberal Arts: The Foundation of a College Education* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

<sup>7</sup> Bowman, N. A. (2013). How Much Diversity is Enough? The Curvilinear Relationship Between College Diversity Interactions and First-Year Student Outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 54 (8), 874-894.

## Kansas State University Principles of Community

Kansas State University is a land-grant, public research university committed to teaching and learning, research, and service to the people of Kansas, the nation, and the world. Our collective mission is best accomplished when every member of the university community acknowledges and practices the following principles:

**We** affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain an atmosphere of justice based on respect for each other.

**We** affirm the value of human diversity and inclusion for community. We stand united against all forms of discrimination.

**We** affirm the right of each person to freely express thoughts and opinions in a spirit of civility and decency. We believe that diversity of views enriches our learning environment, and we promote open expression within a climate of courtesy, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

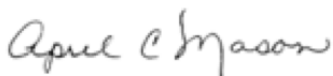
**We** affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain an atmosphere of justice based on respect for each other.

**We** affirm the value of human diversity and inclusion for community. We stand united against all forms of discrimination.

**We** affirm the right of each person to freely express thoughts and opinions in a spirit of civility and decency. We believe that diversity of views enriches our learning environment, and we promote open expression within a climate of courtesy, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

These principles have been endorsed by the following university governance bodies:

- Student Governing Association
- Graduate Student Council
- Graduate Council
- Faculty Senate
- University Support Staff Senate



Charles Taber  
Provost and Executive Vice President



Richard B. Myers  
President

## Where do I start?

In the classroom or at events, we have the chance to explore our common humanity and the ways we can work together to create meaning and shape our culture while also exploring our differences.

When working with students in your classes, you can use the following strategies to help them learn cooperatively and engage with a diverse group of peers in a meaningful way:

- Intentionally form groups that include students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Assign interdependent roles to each member to ensure everyone has equal status and equal opportunity to participate.
- Pursue a shared common goal through collaboration rather than competition.<sup>8</sup>

Group work like this can help students to not only complete tasks and reach their goals, but a chance to have positive interactions that will reduce prejudice and promote friendships.

## Classroom ground rules and courageous conversations

Set ground rules early in the class for maintaining productive discourse. Make sure that students demonstrate a mutual respect for one another, know each other's names, and that they take the opportunity to listen and articulate the viewpoints of others.

We can't make some of these conversations easier, but we do have tips for making them more productive.

Steps to a productive courageous conversation:

1. Identify what you want out of the conversation — If the answer is "I don't know," it's a sure bet that you'll have trouble when you try to talk about it. And it will probably be hard for others to follow what you are saying.
2. Make it safe to talk — Be mindful of the mental, emotional and physical safety of you and the person you are talking to. This means picking a location where the person you are talking to has the freedom to express themselves without judgement or humiliation.
3. Ask simple, unbiased, open-ended questions (and give people time to answer them) — A good question is, "What do you think of my roommate?" A bad question is, "Why do you hate my roommate? Is it because they're gay?" If a conversation is really difficult, folks may need time to take a breath and think things through so don't rush them if it takes a while for them to respond.
4. Use I statements — Saying "You act like..." is an accusation that can put people on edge and turn them off. "I feel uncomfortable when..." avoids blaming someone and keeps communication moving forward.
5. Encourage Listening — Stop talking, put down the phone, face the speaker and truly hear their words. Listen to them the way you want them to listen to you. Every once in a while give a nonverbal signal to let people know you are listening. Better yet, every once in a while summarize what you heard to make sure you're on track. "OK, so what I hear you saying is..."

## Three-F Method

I FELT ... I FOUND ... I FEEL — Going through these three steps can help you to shape the conversation and make it clear that there are ways to grow and change.

For example: a friend or someone you know makes a homophobic comment. Below is a potential way to respond:

1. I FELT ... that way (or have heard that said) when I was younger.
2. But then I FOUND ... out that 29% of LGB youth had attempted suicide at least once in 2015 compared to 6 percent of heterosexual youth.
3. Now I FEEL ... that I have to speak up so no one feels unwelcome or unsafe in our community.

<sup>8</sup> Cuseo, J., et al. (2016). *Thriving in College & Beyond: Research-based Strategies for Academic Success and Personal Development*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Thompson, A., & Cuseo, J. (2014). *Diversity & The College Experience*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.



## Preventing and responding to discrimination and prejudice

Hate crimes and discrimination are not to be ignored or tolerated. But if you see this happening inside or out of the classroom, what actions can you take? What can you do to prevent or intercede during these incidences?

Return to K-State's inclusive nondiscrimination policy:

Kansas State University is committed to nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, ancestry, disability, military status, veteran status, or other non-merit reasons, in admissions, educational programs or activities and employment, including employment of disabled veterans and veterans of the Vietnam Era, as required by applicable laws and regulations.<sup>9</sup>

While any instance of discrimination is unacceptable and might reflect poorly on your experience at K-State, these instances also allow you the opportunity to unite with your students, faculty, staff, and administrators to create a positive impact on your community. Some steps you and your students can take might be to attend diverse events, training sessions, workshops, symposiums, movies, guest speakers, etc.

Also keep in mind that there are many campus resources available to help anyone, students and faculty/staff, that has had to deal with discrimination or harassment, including the Office of Institutional Equality, the Office of Student Life, the Center for Advocacy Response and Education (CARE), the LGBT Resource Center, and the K-State Police.



<sup>9</sup> "Kansas State University" Notice of Nondiscrimination | Kansas State University. August 29, 2017. Accessed March 19, 2018. <http://www.k-state.edu/nondiscrimination/>.

## Chapter 4: Working with a Learning Assistant

### What is a Learning Assistant?

The Learning Assistant is a peer mentor for the first-year students in your CAT Community. As a fellow student who is acquainted with college life, the LA serves as both a social and academic support for students in your class. Although the LA can and will at times serve in a teaching capacity, K-State First distinguishes the LA's role theoretically and practically from that of an instructor or graduate teaching assistant. We believe that the most effective LAs will fill two primary roles:

#### Side-by-Side Role (peer)

As a peer, the LA should come alongside the students in your classroom, providing them with a connection to K-State as well as a picture of a well-integrated college student. Practically, this means the LAs should jump in to your CAT Community, involving themselves in class discussions, sharing their own study habits, attending events, forming friendships with students, etc.

#### Leadership Role (mentor)

As a mentor, the LA acts as someone who has gone before and thus can act as a coach for students. In this role, LAs challenge students to grow both academically and socially and provide structured ways for them to do so. Practically, this may mean facilitating community-building activities, leading discussions, teaching mini-lessons on time management or study skills, hosting study sessions, or meeting with students one-on-one.

As a peer mentor, the LA will need to negotiate and balance both their side-by-side and leadership role, setting an example while being approachable and relatable.

### Ideas for Using the LA in the Classroom

There are a variety of ways to use your LA in the classroom, and we encourage you to use your LA creatively and actively. For example, have the LA:

- Organize and lead a study group.
- Plan a field trip.
- Share study strategies.
- Lead a discussion of the KSBN book.
- Give a presentation on time management.
- Prepare a mini-lecture.
- Facilitate community-building activities.
- And much more!

# FOR R/LAs AND FACULTY:

## A Suggested Guide for Determining Roles and Tasks

### Faculty Task and Roles

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- Grading.
- Deciding learning outcomes.
- Deciding disciplinary measures.
- Privately addressing serious concerns/issues with specific students.
- Collaborating with other faculty.
- Organizing a weekly meeting with the Learning Assistant.

### R/LA Task and Roles

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- Teaching academic habits (test-taking strategies, note-taking skills, study skills, etc.).
- Introducing students to campus resources.
- Facilitating community-building activities.
- Promoting togetherness through casual activities outside of class.
- Facilitating study sessions.
- Walking students to specific locations.
- Organizing outings to free on-campus events.
- Filling out paperwork for room requests.
- Completing K-State Van Training.
- Provide transportation.
- Candidly address classroom problems (i.e. lack of homework, distractions, etc.).
- Demonstrate strong interest in materials and provide supplemental materials.
- Identify relevant cultural connections (via movies, social media, etc.).
- Provide announcements and reminders.
- Collaborating with other LAs.
- Teaching at least one class independently.
- Connecting with students on social media and via text message.

### Shared Task and Roles

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- Preparing materials for class.
- Taking attendance.
- Corresponding with absent students.
- Facilitating class discussions/activities/ice breakers.
- Facilitating study sessions.
- Meeting one-on-one with students.
- Integrating course resources into the class: KSBN Book, library resources, etc.
- Coordinating guest speakers.
- Teaching.
- Administrative, logistical details: Fill out paperwork, make phone calls, reserve tickets, van training, etc.
- Engaging students with active learning techniques.
- Ensuring understanding with clear focus.
- Organizing class activities in a meaningful, logical way.
- Referring to students by name by the second week of class.
- Connecting with students in terms of their writing topics and tasks.
- Creating class activities that are aimed to reinforce content.
- Ensuring effective pacing and variety of active learning activities.
- Clearly stating how classroom activities help students do well on their assignments.
- Providing a timely response to emails.
- Respecting students' input, even when correcting them
- Managing the course Canvas page.
- Actively monitoring students and keeping them on task.
- Allow students to form their own responses and opinions.

## Five Ways to Maximize your LA Relationship

**1. Communicate often.** Research and interviews with former LAs suggest that frequent communication between instructors and Learning Assistants leads to LA success. Once your LA is hired, establish clear and open lines of communication as early as possible. Schedule a meeting with your LA before the fall semester begins and then meet regularly throughout the semester.

**2. Establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities.** Although the LA position is intended to be dynamic and flexible, establishing the LA's role early and clearly helps to maximize the potential of the LA position. Consider looking at examples later in this section or complete the chart on page 18 to determine how you might best use your LA in the classroom.

**3. Provide feedback.** LAs often express a desire for constructive feedback about their performance in the CAT Community. If your LA leads a community-building activity or plans a field trip, providing specific and constructive feedback both before and after the event may not only strengthen their performance, but it can also build your working relationship.

**4. Ask for feedback.** As you feel comfortable, asking your LA for input and feedback about the course can be invaluable. As students, LAs will often notice classroom dynamics not always obvious to an instructor. They may be able to provide insights about types of activities or projects that may work well or not so well. Additionally, they may have useful information about individual students that can help you better work with them.

**5. Remember the faculty mentoring relationship is powerful.** Although LAs are present in the classroom for the benefit of first-year students, they are students themselves. Thus, you can view working with them as an additional teaching and mentoring opportunity. If you know your LAs' career interests, try to provide them with opportunities to build their skill sets in relevant areas. If they do excellent work, provide references for them and help them apply for other jobs. Your influence on them is extremely powerful.

## The LA Training Program

All LAs are asked to participate in K-State First's LA training program, which includes weekly meetings with the LA Coordinator and other LAs across campus. These meetings are designed to help show LAs the importance of peer mentoring to our program, including its philosophical and pedagogical bases. Although we realize every LA will have a unique role based on the needs of his or her particular CAT Community, we want them to be equipped with general strategies for effective peer mentoring. These meetings also help foster community among all of the LAs working with first-year students across campus.

Sample topics covered in the LA Training Program:

- Introducing developmental phases of first-year students.
- Teaching and modeling student success strategies, such as time management, basic note taking, test taking and study skills.
- Planning for active learning, facilitating discussions, coordinating co-curricular events.
- Assisting students who need academic or social support.

Along with the requirement to assist in the one-hour connections course, LAs are also asked to plan a minimum of two supplemental sessions outside of class. These may include organizing or hosting a study session, planning a field trip, coordinating attendance at a lecture, etc. The LA should take the primary responsibility for coordinating each supplemental session, but we encourage faculty members to announce and promote these events to the students in your class.



## Topics for Discussion: CAT Community Faculty and Learning Assistants

Often LAs bring a new perspective to the classroom. Here are some ideas for discussions that you may want to have with your LA.

### LA/Faculty Background

1. What previous experience does the LA have working with students? What special interests or strengths does the LA have that may benefit the CAT Community as a whole?
2. Has the instructor taught this particular course and/or CAT Community before? What changes — if any — might be made? What new ideas could the LA help execute?

### LA Involvement

3. What are the learning outcomes for the CAT Community? How can the Learning Assistant help students meet these objectives?
4. What types of activities will the LA organize or lead? This could include teaching a lesson, planning an icebreaker, leading a small-group discussion, etc.
5. Each LA is responsible for planning two supplemental sessions — outside of class — during the semester. Brainstorm possible ideas for these sessions and tentative times during the semester when these might occur. Previous LAs have arranged field trips, study sessions, movie viewings, etc.

### Details and Logistics

6. What time each week will the LA meet with the CAT Community Instructor?
7. What is the best way for each person to be reached?
8. What is the best way for the LA to communicate an absence (illness, school-related activity, etc.)?
9. How should we communicate if one of us feels that some aspect of the class is not going as planned?

## Determining Roles and Responsibilities

The following grid can be a useful tool to determine your Learning Assistant's responsibilities within your class.

<b>Role and/or Responsibility</b>	<b>Professor</b>	<b>Learning Assistant</b>	<b>Both</b>
Preparing materials for class			
Taking attendance			
Corresponding with absent students			
Facilitating class discussions/ activities/icebreakers			
Teaching academic habits (test- taking strategies, note-taking skills, study skills, etc.)			
Meeting one-on-one with students			
Integrating course resources into the class KSBN book, library resources, etc.			
Coordinating guest speakers			
Organizing and leading study sessions, trips to the library and outside of class instruction			
Other			

Ideas for Supplemental Sessions planned by LA (two required):

Session

Estimated Month/Date

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## Chapter 5: Additional Resources

### Textbook suggestion for your course

Consider using our K-State First textbook, *Your Journey to First-Year Success*, within your course. The textbook is designed to help students explore university expectations and to teach them the skills necessary to succeed while at K-State. The textbook incorporates numerous reflection activities throughout each chapter, designed to keep students focused on the reading and thinking about what they are learning. It includes three major sections: Introducing the University Community, Finding Your Purpose, and Practicing Student Success Skills, along with a section that includes additional resources for further reading. You do not need to use the entire book. Instead explore what is offered and use the sections that you find most useful to your students and your course.

You can find *Your Journey to First-Year Success* on our website, [k-state.edu/first/resources](http://k-state.edu/first/resources).

### Campus events and activities

To help get your students involved in campus events, here is a list of places to find out about what's going on at K-State.

**Campus calendar:** [k-state.edu/calendar](http://k-state.edu/calendar)

**Week of Welcome:** [wow.k-state.edu](http://wow.k-state.edu)

**Landon Lecture Series:** [k-state.edu/lectures/landon](http://k-state.edu/lectures/landon)

**Lou Douglas Lectures:** [k-state.edu/ufm/LouDouglas.htm](http://k-state.edu/ufm/LouDouglas.htm)

### Campus Support Offices

Here is a list of offices on campus where you can direct students if they require additional support.

**One Stop Shop for Student Success, Division of Student Life:** [k-state.edu/onestop/](http://k-state.edu/onestop/)

**Student Access Center:** [k-state.edu/accesscenter/](http://k-state.edu/accesscenter/)

**K-State Healthy Decisions:** [k-state.edu/hd/](http://k-state.edu/hd/)

**Counseling Services:** [k-state.edu/counseling/](http://k-state.edu/counseling/)

**Center for Student Involvement:** [k-state.edu/student-involvement/](http://k-state.edu/student-involvement/)

**Office of Student Life:** [k-state.edu/studentlife/](http://k-state.edu/studentlife/)

**University Success Center:** [K-state.edu/successcenter](http://K-state.edu/successcenter)

### Additional Reading

Angelo, Thomas A., and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook For College Teachers*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004.

Kuh, George D., et al. *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Pascarella, Ernest T. and Patrick T. Terenzini. *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

# GENERAL TIMELINE



## Learning Assistant Hiring

- Identify and nominate Learning Assistant candidates.
- Invite candidates to fill out an application.
- Initiate first contact with LA.

Attend May informational meeting.



## Communicate with LA

- Establish the LA's role inside and outside your classroom.
- Consider sending your LA the syllabus and course policy statement.
- If possible, outline your fall meeting times.
- Help your LA set goals and address concerns.

Consider contacting your students prior to the beginning of the semester

- Inform your students that they are members of a CAT community.
- Introduce yourself and your LA in this email.

Send a copy of syllabus to Greg at [eiselei@k-state.edu](mailto:eiselei@k-state.edu).



Sign faculty consent form online.

Participate in K-State First's SLO assessment plan.

## Communicate with LA

- Set up a standing weekly meeting where you can discuss the outcome of previous classes and plan for the future.
- Help your LA brainstorm supplemental sessions.
- Encourage the LA to share what is being covered in his/her LA meetings.

## Events

- Attend K-State First faculty meetings.
- Attend programwide event.

Begin thinking about Spring LA nominations (perhaps encourage input from your current LA).



## Communicate with LA

- Debrief and evaluate semester with your LA.

Enjoy your break!





**K-STATE**  **FIRST**