

ACCELERATING ACADEMIC INNOVATION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND LIFELONG LEARNERS

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

JUNE 2023

BACKGROUND

K-State has a long history of being aligned and responsive to local community and regional economic needs, as well as global challenges. As a land-grant institution, K-State has long prided itself on its connectivity to the state, developing the state's workforce in line with employer needs, and preparing the next generation of scholars, innovators, and leaders with global relevance.

Like many higher education institutions, K-State is often challenged in how quickly it can adapt, particularly when it comes to aligning educational programs with what employers or communities are expressing in real-time as key areas of need. K-State now has an opportunity to think differently than other universities in how it more nimbly and rapidly meets these needs, leaning into its status as a land-grant institution and one that prioritizes external engagement at all levels. To do so, K-State must reimagine its structures, systems, processes, and even credentials and degrees with an underlying focus on championing academic innovation and ensuring learners remain at the cutting edge of their respective disciplines and ever-changing societal needs. This also includes broadening our definitions of who K-State serves – moving from traditional definitions of students who pursue an undergraduate degree directly from high school to broader definitions of learners that encompass those who enroll in a course either for a formal degree or credential at various times in their lives, or simply to grow and learn. This also must include a careful and ongoing consideration of the mediums and formats most effective to develop and deliver academic programs, helping to bridge the gap between what learners need to succeed and build skills and what educational institutions provide in return.

PROCESS

A task force comprising some of the university's leading voices and diverse perspectives was assembled to better understand the current state of academic innovation across the institution and identify recommendations that will guide this work.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

- Scott DeLoach, Professor and Head, Computer Science, Carl R. Ice College of Engineering, Task Force Co-Chair
- Tanya González, Professor, English, College of Arts & Sciences, and Interim Associate Provost of Institutional Effectiveness, Task Force Co-Chair
- Jenny Bormann, Professor, Animal Sciences & Industry, and Assistant Dean for Academic Programs, College of Agriculture
- Shawna Jordan, Assistant Professor, Food, Dietetics & Health, and Assistant Dean, College of Health & Human Sciences
- Nabeeha Kazi Hutchins, President and CEO, PAI, K-State Alumni
- Brandon Kliewer, Associate Professor, Mary Lynn and Warren Staley School of Leadership
- Parker Larson, Senior, Finance, College of Business Administration
- Colby Moorberg, Associate Professor, Agronomy, College of Agriculture
- Michael Oetken, Assistant Professor, Integrated Studies, K-State Salina
- Karen Pedersen, Dean, K-State Global Campus
- Valentina Pereyrapicabea, Masters Student, Agronomy, College of Agriculture
- Eileen Wertzberger, Assistant Professor, Curriculum & Instruction, and Director, Office of Field Experiences, College of Education
- Andrew Wimp, Assistant Director of Transfer Recruitment, Office of Enrollment Management
- Michael Young, Professor, Psychological Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences, and Faculty Associate, Graduate School
- Ben Wolfe, Dean and CEO, K-State Olathe, ex-officio

This task force met four times from February to April 2023, participating in extensive and in-depth discussions, reviewing data, analyzing best practices, defining the ideal future state for K-State, and developing ideas for bridging the gap between the university's current and future state.

The following findings and recommendations represent a summary of this task force's work, submitted for the university's consideration as key inputs to K-State's future through its next strategic plan.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILD AND PROMOTE A CULTURE OF ACADEMIC INNOVATION THROUGHOUT THE INSTITUTION

In recent years, advances in technology and delivery systems have created a unique opportunity for forward-thinking universities to both develop new formats and structures and institutionalize them in a way that builds a culture of continuous improvement and exploration into new and better ways of reaching and teaching learners. At K-State, this must include incentivizing and pushing faculty to innovate, while also equipping them with the resources they need to develop new courses, programs, and pedagogies. In turn, K-State must also evaluate the underlying structures, policies, systems, and processes that enable academic innovation – pushing the entirety of the institution to build a foundation from which this type of innovation can emerge.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Establish environments that bring faculty from across departments and colleges together to share best practices
 - Emphasize and provide training for faculty on pedagogical innovation
 - Create incentive and reward structure for innovation in program and curriculum design
 - Identify ways to integrate innovation into annual teaching evaluations
- Establish an Academic Innovation Center as central university hub to support innovation in teaching
- Build experiential learning “pods” of students and community members embedded in communities throughout the state, nation, and world
- Expand degree completion pathways that incorporate prior learning credit and stackable credential systems
- Expand support resources that enable innovation, including instructional designers and academic technologists
- Begin transitioning K-State to a 12-month academic calendar

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Develop self-directed undergraduate and graduate programs that facilitate interdisciplinary curriculum
- Fully transition K-State to a 12-month calendar to facilitate more fluid degree progression and year-round learning
- Develop community-embedded small group courses
- Expand partnerships with corporations, alumni, the KSU Foundation to include specific opportunities to support academic innovation
- Develop institution-wide degree completion programs

LEVERAGE INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENTIATORS TO DRIVE ACADEMIC INNOVATION ACROSS ALL FACETS OF K-STATE

K-State is the only university in the state with a presence in all 105 counties. This presence is bolstered by its physical campus footprint in Salina and Olathe, along with a significant virtual footprint through Global Campus and community-embedded presences related research facilities and centers. K-State has an opportunity to bring these differentiated assets together in a unique way to build an educational ecosystem in which, regardless of the entry point, learners and stakeholders have consistent and high-quality academic interactions with the institution. This level of academic integration, paired with K-State’s focus on championing service, engagement, and educational access, can help bridge two areas of strength for K-State in its student experience and focus on community engagement in a way that sets the standard for innovation in higher education among land-grant institutions.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Establish greater presence in high schools around the state, leveraging the KSRE presence in all 105 counties to deliver subject matter expertise
- Develop accelerated undergraduate and graduate degree programs
- Establish greater presence in communities through community-identified, need-based projects that can be addressed by learners through curricular and co-curricular activities

- Adopt nimble academic scheduling that leverages high-profile gatherings/events to promote and connect to academic programming
- Enhance coordination and communication across K-State campuses, KSRE offices, and research centers
- Develop microcredential programs aligned with community needs
- Build the infrastructure and coordination to expand cross-enrollment across K-State campuses

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Develop infrastructure and central repository for data collected through research and community engagement
- Design opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research within communities
- Develop work-based learning programs that allow employees to complete degrees while fully employed

POSITION K-STATE AS THE FIRST CHOICE EDUCATIONAL PARTNER

As a land-grant institution with multiple physical campuses and long-rooted relationships with communities throughout the state, K-State has the opportunity to leverage this footprint in positioning itself as the immediate first-choice educational partner for external stakeholders throughout the state, region, nation, and world, including high schools, community colleges, communities, and industry partners.

K-State's greatest asset is its collective intellectual power. It can both harness and leverage this differentiator in unique ways that build upon this statewide footprint, such as in developing curriculum for high schools in rural communities, promoting ease of access and transferability from community colleges, or meeting the distinct needs of military-affiliated learners. Drawing from its history of aligning with community and industry needs and utilizing its already-strong county-level relationships, K-State also has the opportunity to think creatively in how it answers the call for a skilled workforce and takes a partner-driven approach to many of the big challenges facing our communities and state.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Establish hub for connecting learners with for-credit internship opportunities from industry partners
- Expand partnerships with high schools to expand concurrent enrollment opportunities
- Establish partnerships with community colleges to strengthen pathways to K-State and curricular connections
- Streamline and standardize systems and processes for transferring course evaluations
- Build partnerships with Kansas-based companies to provide targeted continuing education opportunities in coordination with all K-State campuses
- Expand use of professors of practice, with consideration in how programs are designed and implemented

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Develop relationships to create skills-based courses and collaborative teaching models with industry and community partners
- Identify short-duration and residency-based service or research opportunities for learners and faculty within communities

- Expand partnerships with companies to offer credentials and continuing education opportunities tied to identified needs
- Leverage existing partnerships and build new relationships to expand credential and degree offerings through platforms or consortia

PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION OF INNOVATORS, DOERS, AND LIFELONG LEARNERS

Applied learning experiences – which include experiences like traditional internships and practicums (both forms of work-integrated learning), service-learning, community service, research, field study and study away – provide students with the opportunity to apply concepts learned in the classroom to experiences in the world while gaining experience in an industry or community. Integrating opportunities for aligning knowledge gained through their curriculums with real-world scenarios not only provides students with applied experience before completing their degree, but helps them live out the institution’s commitment to public service and explore potential career paths – generating students who are most prepared to be engaged members of their communities and society.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Develop degree maps for all degrees of study that demonstrate how to embed applied learning experiences
- Establish expectations and rewards for integrating applied learning and work-integrated learning
- Provide competitive mini-grants to assist faculty in the innovation or adaptation of their coursework to include applied learning experiences
- Establish work-integrated learning initiative spanning all colleges
- Build programs and funding supports that enable students to receive academic credit for internships
- Develop public service faculty lines to support service learning and engaged scholarship
- Provide students with connections to industry or alumni as part of their student experience

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Require applied learning within all undergraduate and graduate degree programs
- Integrate community-building programs into first-year student experiences built around K-State research priorities or grand challenges
- Establish a central unit or clearinghouse to support integrations and administration of experiential learning
- Identify and develop post-baccalaureate microcredentials that offer opportunities for continuous learning for alumni and others

SUCCESS DEFINED

The task force identified a number of prospective metrics to monitor the success of these priority recommendations and the outcomes they are designed to generate for the institution, including the following:

- Number of educational partnerships with companies
- Percent of Kansas high school graduates that matriculate to K-State
- Number of learners who participate in an applied learning experience
- Increased availability of funding, space, and designated time to innovate academically
- Post-graduate or credential completion career success (placement and salary)