

# K-STATE FIRST

*A great college experience starts with a great first year*

An integrated effort to create an outstanding university experience for every first-year student at Kansas State

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.

December 2009

**K-STATE FIRST**  
**A Proposal to Create a First-Year Program at Kansas State University**

*Executive Summary*

Since fall 2006, faculty, staff, students, and administrators have been discussing, planning, and piloting a first-year experience program at Kansas State University. To build on the momentum of these efforts, and to provide an unparalleled educational experience for our students, we are proposing a first-year program, K-State First.

K-State First is an integrated effort to create an outstanding university experience for every first-year student at Kansas State. 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.

To realize these aims, this proposal makes seven recommendations for a first-year program.

1. Create "K-State First," a university-wide first-year experience program.
2. Create a First-Year Seminar (FYS) program based on the current pilot study.
3. Develop and implement a pilot study for a Learning Communities (LC) program, one with residential and non-residential options. Plan for the eventual creation of a LC program based on the pilot study.
4. Create a common university reading program.
5. Appoint a faculty director and a student life director of K-State First to provide leadership, organization, and coordination for the program. Appoint a K-State First Workgroup to provide oversight, guidance, and support to the program. Provide the program with the resources needed to accomplish its work and mission.
6. Charge the Workgroup and Co-Directors with responsibility for implementing K-State First. Appoint a related University Reading Program Committee to create and implement a common reading program.
7. Develop an assessment and evaluation plan to study the effectiveness of the K-State First courses and program.

The proposed program will cost money, and we are in a period of large budget shortfalls. Research shows, however, that the budgetary benefits of K-State First would outweigh its costs. The K-State First program would support student retention efforts, contribute meaningfully to potential gains in academic performance, and help with the building of a stronger sense of campus community.

## **K-STATE FIRST**

### **A Proposal to Create a First-Year Program at Kansas State University**

#### ***Submitted by:***

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#### **Introduction**

Since fall 2006, faculty, staff, students, and administrators have been discussing, planning, and piloting a first-year experience program at Kansas State University. To build on the momentum of these efforts, and to provide an unparalleled educational experience for our students, we are proposing a first-year program, K-State First. The core of this proposal is a set of recommendations regarding the program and its courses and activities and a second set regarding program administration, implementation, and assessment.

#### **K-State First Recommendations**

##### Recommendations for program, courses, and activities

1. Create K-State First, a university-wide first-year experience program.
2. Create a First-Year Seminar (FYS) program based on the current pilot study.
3. Develop and implement a pilot study for a Learning Communities (LC) program, one with residential and non-residential options. Plan for the eventual creation of a LC program based on the pilot study.
4. Create a common university reading program.

##### Recommendations for administration, implementation, and assessment

5. Appoint a faculty director and a student life director of K-State First to provide leadership, organization, and coordination for the program. Appoint a K-State First Workgroup to provide oversight, guidance, and support to the program. Provide the program with the resources needed to accomplish its work and mission.
6. Charge the Workgroup and Co-Directors with responsibility for implementing the K-State First Program. Appoint a related University Reading Program Committee to create and implement a common reading program.
7. Develop an assessment and evaluation plan to study the effectiveness of the K-State First courses and program.

**Current First-Year Workgroup Members**

Joe Aistrup, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Andrew Barkley, Professor and Coffman University Distinguished Teaching Scholar,  
Department of Agricultural Economics  
Vicki Clegg, Director, Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning  
Tara Coleman, Assistant Professor and Science Librarian, K-State Libraries  
Gregory Eiselein, Professor and Coffman University Distinguished Teaching Scholar,  
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Alison Wheatley, Assistant Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Greg Zolnerowich, Associate Professor, Department of Entomology

## Background

In September 2006, Provost Duane Nellis charged a task force with the development of a set of recommendations to improve the experience of first-year students at K-State. The task force delivered its report to the Provost in February 2007 (Rodgers et al.). The report's most important recommendation was the creation of a first-year seminar program. A General Education Task Force working at the same time made a similar recommendation in June 2007.

The experiences of the two task forces and a subsequent first-year workgroup taught those involved a great deal about the challenges currently facing higher education in the United States. One of the major issues that both task forces discussed was something many of us already knew: many of our students come to college underprepared. According to the 2002 AAC&U report *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, "as colleges admit many more students, the professors who teach them report greater numbers are underprepared for college work. The evidence supports these impressions. Less than one-half of high school graduates complete even a minimally defined college preparatory curriculum in high school, leaving colleges to remedy the education gaps" (online).

The two task forces also confronted the extent to which college student attrition continues to be a significant national problem. Only about half of all college students finish their degrees; and about half of those who drop out of college will do so during their first year. Thus, the first-year is the key transitional moment for students. Additional students dropout during the second year, and the "Sophomore Slump" should also be addressed. In the following four tables, we provide a snapshot of the attrition problem at K-State and nationally using degree completion and student retention data from three sources: "K-State First-Year Experience Task Force Report" (Rodgers et al.), the Office of Planning and Analysis, and ACT. Although K-State has less selective admissions requirements than many Doctoral/Research Extensive Institutions, we believe that the following figures are instructive.

**Figure 1. Retention and Graduation Rates: 1999 First-Time Freshman Cohorts**

Type of Doctoral/Research Extensive Institution	Retention Rate (1-yr)	Retention Rate (2-yr)	Graduation Rate (5-yr)	Graduation Rate (6-yr)
All	84.0%	76.0%	61.0%	66.0%
Public	84.0%	76.0%	60.0%	66.0%
Private	87.0%	79.0%	64.0%	69.0%
Kansas State University	75.0%	67.0%	49.0%	56.0%

**Figure 2. Retention Rates: 2004 First-Time Freshman Cohorts**

Type of Doctoral/Research Extensive Institution	Retention Rate (1-yr)
All	86.0%
Public	86.0%
Private	85.0%
Kansas State University	81.0%

**Figure 3. Five-Year Graduation Rates (1983-2008)**

Graduation Rates	High	Low	2008
National	54.6% (1990)	50.9% (2001)	52.5%
Public Doctoral Institutions	50.6% (1989, 1990)	45.0% (2001)	48.6%
Kansas State University	52.9% (1998)	42.2% (1988)	51.7%

**Figure 4. Retention Rates from First-Year to Second Year (1983-2008)**

Retention Rates	High	Low	2008
National	68.7% (2007)	65.7% (2008)	65.7%
Public Doctoral Institutions	78.1% (2004)	72.9% (2008)	72.9%
Kansas State University	81.0% (2004)	72.6% (1984)	74.3%

Higher levels of education provide significant benefits to both individuals and society. The Institute for Higher Education Policy summarizes these benefits:

1. Public economic benefits: increased tax revenues, greater productivity, increased consumption, increased workforce flexibility, and decreased reliance on government financial support.
2. Individual economic benefits: higher salaries and benefits, employment, higher savings levels, improved working conditions, and personal/professional mobility.
3. Public social benefits: reduced crime rates, increased charitable giving/community service, increased quality of civic life, social cohesion/appreciation of diversity, and improved ability to adapt to and use technology.
4. Individual social benefits: improved health/life expectancy; improved quality of life for offspring; better consumer decision making; increased personal status; more hobbies, leisure activities.

(Cited in Habley and McClanahan, Appendix 1, page 2).

Such benefits are grossly diminished when students leave school and are unable to finish their degrees.

Student persistence also provides significant financial benefits to universities. Retention is more cost-effective than recruitment: "retention initiatives designed to manage student enrollment are estimated to be 3-5 times more cost-effective than recruitment efforts, i.e., 3-5 already enrolled students can be retained at the college for the same cost incurred to recruit one new student to the college" (Cuseo 2). By retaining a student for the second, third, and fourth years, a university saves the money it would cost to recruit a replacement student and saves the tuition dollars the student would pay for the second, third, and fourth years.

The causes, cures, and cost-savings related to improving student persistence to degree are complex, and neither the task force nor the current workgroup has performed a thorough analysis of the savings to be realized by improving student persistence. Based on its reading of the current research on retention, however, The "K-State First-Year Experience Task Force Report" (Rodgers et al.) did conclude that "the creation of a first-year seminar ... can likely account for a 5-15% improvement in four-year graduation rates," which "would provide a means for retaining the tuition of ... 400 ... to 1200 [students] whom we are currently losing." The current workgroup has estimated that we are losing about one-fourth of the entering first-year class, which represents \$17-18 million in lost tuition. Every one percent improvement in student retention results in savings of \$600,000 or more. Although our calculations are a rough estimate, a more thorough study has shown that every 1% improvement in retention rates at Saint Louis University would generate about a half-million dollars in saved revenues (Cuseo 2).

The current workgroup has not focused on issues of retention per se, but the experiences of both the original task force and the workgroup have made us highly aware of why the University is concerned with issues of retention and persistence. Our focus has been student success and student learning, but we also understand well that these issues—retention and student success—are two sides of the same coin.

The reading and research of the task force and the workgroup have introduced us to the many attempts to understand and address the related problems of under-preparation and attrition. *What Works in Student Retention*, for instance, identifies the three "Retention practices responsible for the greatest contribution to retention in four-year public colleges": academic advising, learning support, and first-year programs (Habley & McClanahan 6). *High Impact Educational Practices* focuses first on "first-year seminars and experiences" before going to the importance of common intellectual experiences and learning communities (Kuh 9-10). *Proving and Improving: Strategies for Assessing the First College Year* reports that FYS programs have been shown to increase student retention 10% (Swing 96). Davig and Spain's empirical study examined what was most effective in these courses and found that "the elements most highly correlated to persistence" were activities/topics dedicated to "the development of strong social networks (with both faculty and students)" and to the "integration [of students] into the institution" (305). Other studies have demonstrated the long-term effects of the first-year seminar, showing significantly higher retention rates for students who take a FYS class than for those who do not (e.g Schnell and Doetkott).

The extensive literature on retention points to an important conclusion: effective first-year seminar and first-year experience programs are among the most powerful and proven ways to improve both student success and student persistence to degree.

## Recent First-Year Efforts

Although no official action ensued following the release of the "K-State First-Year Experience Task Force Report" (Rogers et al.) in early 2007, some members of that task force continued informally to meet and imagine the creation of an effective first-year experience program for K-State. With the advice and support of this group, Gregory Eiselein and Emily Lehning proposed the creation of a pilot study in fall 2008 to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of a first-year seminar program in enhancing the learning experience of first-year students at K-State.

The small seminars in this pilot study were designed to impact students' learning in terms of critical thinking and communication skills, to improve engagement and increase feelings of belongingness, and to prepare students for a successful transition to university life and college-level learning. The primary way the program sought to do this was by enrolling new students into small sections (no class had more than 22 students) of regular, academic classes such as geology, sociology, English, political science, entomology, etc. All of the classes emphasized active learning, critical thinking, and development of communication skills.

There were 270 students in the study, placed in 16 sections from five colleges, including the College of Technology and Aviation in Salina, which has been a full partner in these efforts from the start. First-year students may take courses in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. To ensure that the individuals in the cohort were broadly typical of new K-State students, we worked with Enrollment Services to make the enrollment of these students random.

All of the classes emphasized co-curricular events. The aim was to connect learning inside the classroom with campus events and activities outside of class. For example, all of the FYS sections attended an Election Watch in the K-State Student Union, an event that drew over 400. A FYS faculty member reported, "I was stunned when I walked into the watch at the energy of the crowd!" One of the students, a first-year student in Animal Science, said she enjoyed the event because "it was interesting to be able to hear the [political] views of other students in an open and non-hostile environment." Other FYS events were class-specific: for example, a visit to K-State's Insect Zoo was a co-curricular event for the ENTOM 301 Insects and People course.

Students thought these classes were excellent: 73% of the FYS classes had "excellent course" ratings at or above the national IDEA Database average. As the IDEA Group Summary Report explains, "When this percentage exceeds 60%, the inference is the Group's overall instructional effectiveness was unusually high." Students also thought their instructors were excellent: 73% of the FYS classes had "excellent teacher" ratings at or above the national IDEA Database average. The written comments were overwhelmingly positive, and they came from a range of classes. One student said, for example:

This class was incredible. [The instructor] was one of the best teachers I've ever had. I think the First-Year Seminar program is an amazing idea. This is a program that should become the norm. The atmosphere and style of the class were very conducive to learning.

As the two tables below suggest, the 2008 FYS pilot saw improvements in retention and in academic achievement.



**Figure 5. Retention Rates from Fall 2008 to Fall 2009: First-Time Freshman Cohorts**

Enrollment by percentage of original cohort	Fall 2009
Fall 2008 Freshmen Cohort	78.79%
Fall 2008 FYS Cohort	81.50%

**Figure 6. Fall 2008 GPA Data: First-Time Freshman Cohorts**

Fall 2008	FYS Students	All First-Time, First-Year KSU Students
Cumulative Mean GPA	2.9258	2.756

Although these measures are just two data points in the initial stages of our work, they suggest, when coupled with research from around the country, that we have made a meaningful start at improving the educational experience of the students enrolled in these first-year seminars.

The FYS pilot study continued into fall 2009, and it is currently running 22 FYS sections with just over 400 students. This semester's program-wide event was a reading by the former Poet Laureate Billy Collins in a packed Alumni Center Ballroom. A first-year seminar student in Entomology said about the event: "The Poet Laureate had me engaged and laughing the whole time. I loved it!"

Alongside the pilot study, members from the original task force along with other faculty, administrators, staff, and students continued to discuss and plan the possible creation of a first-year experience program at K-State. This workgroup in different forms has met on a monthly basis from fall 2008 to the present, slowly adding volunteer participants from across the University and dividing as needed into sub-committees to work on laying the groundwork for the creation of an integrated, university-wide program for first-year students.

This workgroup has looked at the research on first-year student success, at current best practices in first-year programs, and at the results of our own ongoing pilot study. Some members of the workgroup have drawn on their experiences with a first-year program in their own college or unit. Others have traveled to national conferences and workshops to learn about the effective creation and maintenance of a first-year program, including the National Conference on First-Year Assessment and the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience. Our most recent data gathering effort was a site visit by four members of the workgroup to the University of Oregon, a model for first-year programs at large institutions.

Using this information and our discussions with each other, with colleagues at other universities, and with a broad range of campus constituents (including students, faculty, staff, administrators), we propose the following seven recommendations.

**Recommendation 1. Create "K-State First," a university-wide first-year experience program.**

Such a program would provide a holistic approach to new students at K-State. The proposed program would integrate and better coordinate existing K-State programs for new students, improve communication across the programs, and reduce administrative inefficiencies. A unified program would offer a clear, meaningful promotion and marketing presentation of the programs K-State offers to first-year students.

We propose the name for the program be "K-State First" and the motto be "A great college experience starts with a great first year." The following statement of philosophy would guide the program:

K-State First is an integrated effort to create an outstanding university experience for every first-year student at Kansas State. 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.

K-State First would be built on academic core that includes First-Year Seminars (FYS) and Learning Communities (LC). Each of these academic experiences is discussed in more detail below at Recommendation 2 and 3.

K-State First would also have the following responsibilities:

- Advocate for first-year students and promote first-year friendly instructional techniques as well as developmental academic and career advising.
- Organize and implement a common university reading program in which all first-year students would participate as part of their introduction to university life and all other K-State community members would be invited to participate.
- Create student-centered and student-led co-curricular events connected to the reading program, the FYS classes, and the LCs; support and encourage the creation of student-centered co-curricular events for first-year students.
- Coordinate K-State First's academic offerings with other units providing courses specifically designed for first-year students, courses such as EDCEP 111 University

Experience (an academic skills course), DAS 100 Freshman Seminar (the College of Arts and Sciences's introduction to University cultural life), and the college and department orientations among others.

- Coordinate K-State First's efforts with other units that work to help new students with their transition to K-State, including New Student Services, orientation and enrollment, Wildcat Warm-up, Week of Welcome, International Student and Scholar Services, residence life, and advising, among others.
- Coordinate K-State First's efforts with relevant student life and student support resources, including advising, academic assistance, Healthy Decisions, campus engagement opportunities, multicultural resources, and health and safety resources, among others.
- Supervise and develop the Guide to Personal Success (GPS) program, a mentoring program for new students.
- Assess the effectiveness of the K-State First courses and program, to provide meaningful improvement and future advancement.

Offering small sections of courses with exceptional faculty is a resource intensive, yet effective strategy in improving the academic transition for first-year students. Universities across the country have implemented variations of first-year programs, with the most noteworthy programs including a comprehensive approach to first-year seminar courses.

We imagine a comprehensive program that also allows students to select the type of first-year experience or course best suited to their needs and temperaments. Thus, some students might enroll in a FYS, some in one of the LCs, and others in some other first-year transition course such as DAS 100 or one of the University Experience classes.

Because of the size, scope, and complexity of K-State First, our strategy is to build the program gradually over a ten-year period from the 2008 pilot study to a robust program that enables all entering first-year students to participate in 2017-18.

Currently, 164 students are enrolled in 10 sections of DAS 100. The four sections of University Experience and 16 sections of Enhanced University Experience serve 464 students. If the first-year class entering in 2017 is approximately the same size as the 2007 entering class, we would need seats for approximately 3300 students. We could provide each of them with a first-year transition course with small increases in the numbers of students enrolled in DAS 100 and University Experience and the creation of approximately 60 of LCs and 50 FYSs for 2017-18:

Students in University Experience	500 [in 24-26 sections]
Students in DAS 100	200 [in 10-12 sections]
Students in FYSs	1100 [22 students x 50 FYSs]
<u>Students in LCs</u>	<u>1500 [25 students x 60 LCs]</u>
Total	3300

Although each of these four types of courses differs from the others, they all serve first-year students with the aim of helping them with the transition to college learning and college life. We could further unify the experience of these students by asking them all to participate in Week of Welcome, the common university reading program, and other campus events during the course of the fall term. A few shared faculty development experiences might help the instructors in each of these different courses. Finally, as we elaborate in recommendation 7, we would create an assessment plan that would allow us to track the effectiveness of each kind of course.

**Recommendation 2. Create a First-Year Seminar (FYS) program based on the current FYS pilot study.**

The FYS courses involve exceptional faculty teaching a regular academic course that could be included on many programs of study. The courses are capped at 22 students and promote critical thinking, communication, and community building as shared student learning outcomes, in addition to the student learning outcomes related to the curricula. The pilot study has shown that such a program is both feasible and effective.

In 2008 we offered 16 sections of FYS courses with 270 students, and this year we are offering 22 sections with over 400 students. In 2010-11, we propose increasing the number of sections to 30 sections or more with the hope of accommodating about 650 students in FYS classes. By 2017-18, we would hope to be able to offer 50 sections of 22 students each, which would accommodate 1100 first-years or approximately one-third of an entering class. If the size of the K-State student body were to grow over the next eight years, we would hope to increase the offering of FYS classes in a corresponding fashion.

The pilot study has included from the start a faculty development program in which faculty meet regularly to discuss teaching and assessment strategies, administrative details and coordination efforts, co-curricular events, as well the nature of the first year of college and first-year students in the twenty-first century. This faculty development program would be continued and expanded with some support of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the Faculty Exchange for Teaching Excellence.

**Recommendation 3. Develop and implement a pilot study for a Learning Communities (LC) program, one with residential and non-residential options. Plan for the eventual creation of a LC program based on the pilot study.**

Learning Communities (LC) take a dynamic, interdisciplinary approach to the first year. A group of 25 students enroll in two separate courses and, in addition, share a one-hour Connections Course that helps students draw links between the two disciplines. The LC Connections Course is taught by an instructor of one of the regular courses, and its student learning outcomes emphasize critical thinking, communication skills, and community building. A LC might, for example, involve courses in physics and music with the course connections component that has content at the intersection of the disciplines and provides additional attention to first-year academic transition support.

In addition to the Connections Course, a Learning Communities Assistant (LCA) is essential to each LC. The instructors in these courses would be research and teaching faculty who would have the help of an undergraduate academic assistant, an outstanding student leader who has taken one or both of the courses in the LC. The LCAs would be recruited, trained, and supervised by K-State First staff. Outside of class, LCAs would conduct study groups, organize social activities, and work with University librarians to help train students to use library resources.

We would like to begin the LC component of K-State First in fall 2010 with a pilot study of five such learning communities, a study that would include ten regular courses, five Connections Courses, and as many as 125 students. Two of these learning communities would be residential: the students would not only take the two courses and the one-hour Connections Course together but also live together in the same residence hall. The other three would be non-residential: the 25 students would share a block of courses, but they would not necessarily live in the same hall.

We would like to double the number of learning communities in 2011-12 and steadily increase the number until we are offering 60 LCs in 2017-18. Of these 60 LCs, 20 would be residential and 40 non-residential, and they would collectively serve approximately 1500 students.

Like the faculty, LCAs would participate in a training and development program to prepare them for their role in K-State First. This training would provide LCAs with an introduction to the concerns facing first-year students and give LCAs the opportunity to gain practical knowledge and skills to help them assist their professors in the instruction of the course. The LCAs would learn how to understand transition issues of incoming first-year students, recognizing differences in background and experience; to communicate effectively with students, faculty, and administrative staff; to understand group and classroom dynamics; to facilitate small group discussions; to give effective presentations; to organize helpful study groups; and to use library resources effectively and explain the library system.

#### **Recommendation 4. Create a common university reading program.**

A common reading program has proven to be an effective part of many first-year experience programs, and it can often bring local and national publicity to a campus. There are two well-known benefits of such a program. First, it sends students the right message about the importance of reading in college, emphasizing the importance of academics at the start of a student's undergraduate experience and helping to set the right academic tone for the first year generally. Second, it provides incoming students with a common experience and topic for conversation as soon as they arrive on campus; this common experience helps create bonds among students as well as the other members of the campus community who are reading the common book.

In fall 2008, a group of librarians from Hale and faculty from English began to discuss the creation of a common university reading program. In fall 2009, that group was re-organized and expanded into a committee, chaired by Tara Coleman from K-State Libraries and Stephen Kiefer from the University Honors Program, to explore the creation of a common reading program to begin in fall 2010.

This group has conducted two different surveys of the campus community, a broad one in the spring of 2009 and a second one focused on the interests and preferences of current first-year students. After exploring from fall 2008 until now dozens of possibilities, the committee has selected a book for the common reading program: Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008).

A *New York Times* bestseller and a page-turning work of new fiction with broad appeal, *The Hunger Games* tells the story of a not-too-distant future in which the United States of America has collapsed, weakened by drought, fire, famine, and war, to be replaced by Panem, a country divided into the Capitol and 12 districts. Each year, two young representatives from each district are selected by lottery to participate in The Hunger Games. The televised games are broadcasted throughout Panem as the 24 participants are forced to eliminate their competitors, literally, with all citizens required to watch. When 16-year-old Katniss's young sister, Prim, is selected as the mining district's female representative, Katniss volunteers to take her place. She and her male counterpart, Peeta, will be pitted against bigger, stronger representatives who have trained for this their whole lives.

The reading of this book will be accompanied by a set of exciting campus events and educational activities centered on the book. The committee is developing a suggested set of classroom units to encourage a wide array of disciplinary and interdisciplinary connections to the book's primary themes—for example, natural and built environments, agriculture and food distribution, government and human rights, economics and ethics, entertainment and the media, freedom and individualism, and more. Two of the other events currently being planned—a public talk by the author Suzanne Collins and a massive multi-player game that advantages those who have read the novel most closely—will be open to the entire campus community. Our goal for all of these events is to engage students, encourage reading, and build community.

This group has also now divided into four sub-committees, each of which is laying the groundwork for implementation of a reading program in fall 2010. The four sub-committees are currently preparing (1) to arrange for the purchase and distribution of the books to first-year

students and the campus community; (2) to plan a set of exciting student-centered and student-led events to support the reading program and its integration into selected first-year classes; (3) to publicize the program to the new students, the campus, the local community, and the media; and (4) to assess the effectiveness of the reading program in achieving its primary outcomes.

If the idea of a common reading program and the book selection itself meets with your approval, we recommend that a University Reading Program Committee be officially charged with the creation and implementation of the program. The current committee, which has been working closely with the First-Year Workgroup, includes:

Laurie Bagby, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science  
 Kevin Blake, Professor, Department of Geography  
 Lynn Carlin, Interim Vice Provost For Information Technology  
 Tara Coleman, Assistant Professor and Science Librarian, K-State Libraries (Co-Chair)  
 Gregory Eiselein, Professor and Coffman University Distinguished Teaching Scholar,  
 Department of English  
 Lauren Everett, undergraduate student, College of Human Ecology  
 Sara Kearns, Instruction Coordinator, K-State Libraries  
 Stephen Kiefer, Director, University Honors Program (Co-Chair)  
 Emily Lehning, Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Director of New Student  
 Services  
 María Teresa Martínez-Ortiz, Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Languages  
 Robin Mosher, Instructor, Department of English  
 Kara Northway, Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of English  
 Elisabeth Pankl, Humanities Librarian, K-State Libraries  
 Kathryn Rush, undergraduate student, College of Arts and Sciences  
 Jacqueline Spears, Associate Professor, Department of Secondary Education  
 Marcia Stockham, Chair of Social Sciences/Humanities Department and Education Librarian,  
 K-State Libraries  
 Karin Westman, Head, Department of English

This group emerged voluntarily. Those who wanted to see a common reading program joined, participated, showed up, and worked. We expect that the President's Office and/or the Provost's Office may want to make additions to the committee, and we would welcome the insight and the help of additional committee members as seems appropriate.

We have tentatively negotiated a substantial volume discount from the publisher and hope to include the costs of the books (at a discounted price) for the first-year students in their larger orientation and enrollment fees. To fund the majority of the program's events, we plan to use the margin between the students' price and the substantially discounted volume price from the publisher. Thus, we anticipate that the overall cost of the program to the University in dollars to be very low. The time and talent of the faculty, staff, students, and administrators working on this project has not, of course, been inconsequential.



**Recommendation 5. Appoint a faculty director and a student life director of K-State First to provide leadership, organization, and coordination for the program. Appoint a K-State First Workgroup to provide oversight, guidance, and support to the program. Provide the program with the resources needed to accomplish its work and mission.**

#### Leadership and staffing for the launch of K-State First

In the short term, building on the momentum of the pilot studies and the efforts of the workgroup, K-State First could begin with the leadership of two part-time co-directors and a graduate teaching assistant (GTA). The workgroup has considered and developed other possible administrative models but believes that for practical reasons a co-director model will provide the best start for the program. Given current budget constraints and the unique way in which the K-State First proposal has emerged, a co-director model might be the most effective and feasible way to begin the program. With the consent and support of their supervisors (Karin Westman, English Department Head, and Pat Bosco, Vice President for Student Life), Dr. Eiselein and Dr. Lehning could step into the co-director roles as K-State First is launched.

Nevertheless, some members of the workgroup feel strongly that the long-term flourishing of the program will depend eventually on the appointment of "a sole director at a Dean or Associate Provost level, with 0.8 administration and 0.2 teaching in the program, with coordinators/assistant directors below him or her" and establishment of an office for the staff. Such a view is valid and well supported by an examination of administrative practices at the nation's top first-year programs. Because the model being proposed below is atypical and because there is considerable evidence that a sole director at the Associate Provost level may provide better long-term institutional stability for the program, we understand well that the University may want to conduct a program review after three years and consider other possible administrative models.

The co-director model provides for a student life professional and a member of the teaching faculty to share the responsibility of developing and implementing K-State First. Each would maintain responsibilities in their home department and, in addition, would report to the Provost and the Vice President for Student Life. The K-State First Workgroup would advise, support, and provide input on the development of the program.

The GTA has been a vital dimension of this effort from the beginning of the first pilot study. We hope that this support for the program and this opportunity for a graduate student will continue. The K-State First GTA would be an important part of the support for the faculty co-director and the FYS and LC faculty. This position provides support for all assessment of K-State First, including administering in-class assessments. The GTA helps coordinate faculty training sessions, assists with the faculty selection, and provides support in connecting co-curricular activities to the classroom. In addition to serving an important faculty development support role, the GTA will also provide support to K-State First's ongoing teaching and research efforts.

#### Administrative, staffing, and office plans for the future

In the long run, we expect the program will require additional staff and the creation of office space for this staff.

An assistant director or administrative assistant would assist in the day-to-day operations of the program. We anticipate the need for informal advising of students, assistance with promotion of courses, help in meeting coordination, and overall program management. Currently and in 2010-11, this work is being done by staff in the Office of the Vice-President for Student Life and the Department of English as well as members of the First-Year Workgroup. Because this work is not technically part of their work assignments, because it is inefficient to have so many different people working on these tasks, and because we anticipate the complexity and amount of work to increase as the program grows, we expect K-State First will soon need an assistant director or administrative assistant to help with the day-to-day operations.

The programs and events coordinator would provide the logistical support for faculty training and would have responsibility for the program-wide co-curricular activities. The co-curricular activities are an essential part in encouraging community building among the students and faculty. This position would also have important roles in campus planning groups for events such as orientation and enrollment, Week of Welcome, residence hall welcome activities, the reading program, and other events important for first-year students. It is possible that this position could be created by adding to and transforming one currently located in Student Life.

The LCAs coordinator is designed to be a graduate student position with primary responsibility for recruiting, selecting, training, and managing the corps of undergraduate student mentors for LCs. The student mentors would be selected from students who had successfully completed a FYS or LC course in the previous semesters. This element of K-State First has not yet been created, and so there has been no work yet associated with it. During the initial, pilot years of the program, we expect that the K-State First GTA and Co-Directors will develop and train the LCAs. Our research into other programs has shown us that eventually we will need a staff member whose primary responsibility is the management, training, and coordination of the projected 60 LCAs.

Other groups that will help guide the program include the K-State First Workgroup, the FYS and LC faculty, and the undergraduate LCAs. We recommend that the initial K-State First Workgroup be composed of the members of the current workgroup, though we expect that the President's Office and/or the Provost's Office will want to make changes or additions, which we would, of course, welcome.

#### K-State First costs and budget estimates

**The cost for the inaugural year of K-State First in 2010-11 would be approximately \$176,000. This is an increase of \$103,262 over the \$72,738 being expended for the 2009 pilot study.**

**By 2017-18, we estimate the cost of the fully implemented program to be over \$773,000.**

Still, these figures and estimates are incomplete. This projection for the tenth year is sketched in terms of 2009 dollars not 2017 dollars. It assumes that the first-year class entering in 2017 is approximately the same size as the 2007 entering class. To accommodate all first-year students at

K-State, we estimate needing resources beyond the financial outlay to provide courses. Additional study of course schedules and facilities/room schedules needs to be conducted.

These budgets do not include, moreover, the establishment of two future K-State First projects that we think will also help with retention and graduation: Transfer Seminars and a Sophomore Year Experience. We have not yet developed a proposal for these two related programs. Our assumption has been that we need to implement a first-year program before designing these other, smaller programs.

The following pages contain an estimated budget for 2010-11 as well as budget for implementation of a full program. We have also included for your reference budget information for the two years of the pilot study in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Following the budgets, we have included a suggested set of compensation policies that we are recommending for implementation in the 2011-12 school year and thereafter. These policies should help administrators with budget planning, faculty with understanding clearly the financial incentives and conditions for participation, and Department Heads with knowing exactly the purpose and use of program funds.

### Projected Budget for Inaugural Year of K-State First, 2010-11

FYS Courses (30 courses, 650 students) <sup>1</sup>	\$ 85,000
Learning Communities (5 LCs, 125 students) <sup>2</sup>	\$ 10,000
Peer Mentor for the International FYS section	\$ 1,000
GTA	\$ 10,000
Co-Directors <sup>3</sup>	\$ 40,000
Other Payroll Expenses <sup>4</sup>	\$ 15,000
Publicity and Marketing Expenses	\$ 5,000
Events and OOE	\$ 5,000
Professional Development and Travel	\$ 5,000
<b>TOTAL for 2010-11</b>	<b>\$176,000</b>

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<sup>1</sup> For the pilot study and for 2010-11, a FYS course has cost typically \$4,000. By partnering with Honors and English, we have managed to offer a few additional sections at little or no extra cost. In the long run, we recommend a uniform compensation policy. Please see below.

<sup>2</sup> Each non-residential LC costs \$2,000. The instructor of the connections course will receive \$1,500, and the LCA \$500. Each residential LC will cost \$2,000 plus room and board for the LCA, who lives with the first-years in the residence hall and is compensated with room and board (approximately \$6,750 per academic year). For the pilot study in 2010-11, Housing and Dining has agreed to cover the full room and board costs for the residential LCAs.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is based on the following calculation of two co-directors: Student Life Co-Director (salary enhancement or 1/10's of salary, \$20,000) plus a Faculty Director (course release each semester [\$10K to home department] + summer stipend of \$10,000 = \$20,000).

<sup>4</sup> Estimate for Social Security, Medicare, Workers Compensation, retirement and life insurance contributions.

**Budget for Full Program, estimated implementation 2017-18***Courses*

50 FYSs @ \$5,000 each	\$250,000	
60 LCs @ \$2,000 (includes \$500 for each LCA)	\$120,000	
		(\$370,000)

*Salary*

Co-Directors	\$ 50,000	
Administrative Assistant	\$ 35,000	
Programs/Events Coordinator	\$ 45,000	
LCAs Coordinator	\$ 15,000	
Graduate Teaching Assistant	\$ 15,000	
Other Payroll Expenses	\$ 48,000	
Room and Board for 20 Residential LCAs <sup>5</sup>	\$135,000	
		(\$343,000)

*Other Expenses*

Publicity and Marketing Expenses	\$ 20,000	
Events	\$ 20,000	
Professional Development and Travel	\$ 10,000	
OOE	\$ 10,000	
		(\$ 60,000)
<b>TOTAL for 2017-18</b>		<b>\$773,000</b>

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<sup>5</sup> Based on our examination of the residential FIGs program at the University of Oregon, we recommend that the costs here be split between Housing and Dining (60%) and the Office of the Provost (40%). The budget presented here is the full, undivided cost.

## Historical Budget Information

The following summaries represent budget information for the two years of the pilot study. The funds have been provided by a variety of sources during the beginning phases of developing the program, including resources made available through the Coffman Chair award in 2008-09 and additional funds provided by the President, Provost, and Dean of Arts and Sciences. The Office of the Vice-President for Student Life and the Department of English helped with staff time, supplies, and office expenses. Partnerships with Honors and English provided additional FYS courses at little or no cost. The first two years of the pilot study have been conducted by volunteer co-directors, a volunteer workgroup representative of campus entities that work with first-year students, and various in-kind contributions from units around campus.

### Budget for Pilot Study Year One, 2008-09

#### *Expenses*

Classes	\$44,000
Travel (conferences)	\$ 6,174
GTA	\$ 9,670
Events and OOE	\$ 5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$64,844</b>

#### *Source of Funds*

Provost's Office	\$52,674
Coffman funds	\$10,000
Arts and Sciences	\$ 2,170

### Budget for Pilot Study Year Two, 2009-10

#### *Expenses*

Classes	\$52,000
Travel (site visit and conference)	\$ 7,210
GTA	\$ 9,670
Events and OOE	\$ 3,858
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$72,738</b>

#### *Source of Funds*

Provost's Office	\$50,000
President's Office	\$ 7,210
Arts and Sciences	\$14,170
OOE rolled over from 2008-09	\$ 1,358

## Compensation Guidelines

### First-Year Seminars (FYS)

First-Year Seminars are typically 3-credit courses taught in the fall or spring. Total compensation for teaching a FYS is \$5,000 (plus other payroll expenses, if taken as salary<sup>6</sup>). Two faculty members co-teaching a First-Year Seminar may split the compensation.

Faculty members who participate in the FYS program will teach FYS courses as part of their regular teaching obligation. For those teaching "in-load," the FYS payment of \$5,000 remains with the home department to be used as the department needs and as the department head determines. Faculty members who are on a probationary, tenure-track appointment with a research percentage may only teach on an in-load basis within the FYS program.

In certain instances, with the approval of the home department or unit, faculty members may teach a FYS in addition to their regular teaching responsibilities, or out-of-load, and may choose to take the FYS payment of \$5,000 as professional development money<sup>7</sup> or as salary. Faculty members who are on a tenure-track appointment with a research percentage never teach on an out-of-load basis within the FYS program.

### Connections Course (LC)

Connections Courses are 1-credit, fall-term courses taught by faculty as part of the LC Program. The compensation for a faculty member teaching a Connections Course is \$1,500 (plus other payroll expenses, if taken as salary) plus a Learning Communities Assistant (LCA) to help with the course. Two faculty members co-teaching a LC block may split the compensation.

Each LCA receives a \$500 stipend. The residential LCAs, who are expected to live in and work with residence life staff for the duration of the academic year, will also receive a waiver of their room and board costs.

With the approval of the home department or unit, faculty members who teach a Connections Course may choose to take the FYS payment of \$1,500 as professional development money or as salary.

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<sup>6</sup> Faculty members taking their compensation as salary will be paid the full amount, and their departments will be paid the amount needed to cover other payroll expenses.

<sup>7</sup> Professional development money must be used for the enhancement of teaching or research responsibilities, e.g., purchasing teaching materials, professional travel, hiring students, or purchasing equipment. Any equipment or materials purchased become the property of the faculty member's department. It remains the department's responsibility to ensure the funds are spent according to these guidelines. K-State First does not pay other payroll expenses on compensation taken as professional development monies.

**Recommendation 6. Charge the Workgroup and Co-Directors with responsibility for implementing K-State First. Appoint a related University Reading Program Committee to create and implement a common reading program.**

Since the delivery of the "First-Year Experience Task Force Report" (Rodgers et al.) in February 2007, some members from the original task force along with some other faculty, administrators, staff, and students have been working on an unofficial and volunteer basis to imagine and design the best possible first-year programs for Kansas State University. If there is a decision to move forward with the creation of the proposed K-State First program, we recommend that the President and Provost officially appoint a K-State First Workgroup and charge this Workgroup with responsibility for implementing K-State First.

We recommend that this K-State First Workgroup be composed of the dedicated and diverse members of the informal workgroup that has shown a commitment to the improvement of the educational experience of first-year students, even in the absence of an official charge or direct responsibility. Although the members of the current workgroup have communicated extensively with representatives from each of the undergraduate colleges, the Workgroup emerged voluntarily and without official charge or design. Thus, we anticipate that the President, the Provost, the Vice-President for Student Life, and/or Faculty Senate Leadership may want to make additions to the official Workgroup. We would welcome additional Workgroup members, their feedback, and support.

We would also recommend that the President and/or Provost officially appoint a related University Reading Program Committee to create and implement the common reading program sketched above. Again we recommend that the members of the current and unofficial committee form the basis of the new University Reading Program Committee.

Both the K-State First Workgroup and the University Reading Program Committee should be charged to work with Student Life, the Office of Communications and Marketing, and others on campus to promote the new programs and to provide incoming students and their families, the campus community, and the public with information about the new programs for first-year students.

Both K-State First and the University Reading Program would commence officially at the start of the 2010-11 academic year.



**Recommendation 7. Develop an assessment and evaluation plan to study the effectiveness of the K-State First courses and program.**

From the beginning of the original design of the first FYS pilot study, assessment has been an essential part of our first-year efforts. We recommend that K-State First continue to work with the Office of Assessment to assess the student learning in these courses and to evaluate more comprehensively the effectiveness of the K-State First program.

We recommend that we follow and assess the progress and success of students in the FYS and LC courses, those in DAS 100 and University Experience, and those who have no kind of first-year experience course at K-State

The key components of this assessment plan would include the following components already in use in the pilot study:

- Tracking and evaluation of GPAs, persistence, and graduation rates. This tracking would match students according to ACT scores and high school GPAs.
- Teaching evaluations. We would continue to use the IDEA teaching evaluation in the FYS and LC courses, with a set of additional first-year specific questions and its group report features.
- Standardized test scores. We would use ACT's CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency) examination, a standardized and nationally normed assessment tool, in the FYS and LC courses as well as the other first-year courses with which we will be working (the Honors classes for first-year students, University Experience, and DAS 100).
- Engagement survey. We would continue to administer our own online survey of student engagement developed for the FYS pilot studies by Clive Fullagar and Disha Rupayana from the Department of Psychology.
- Qualitative information. The program would continue to seek the feedback of the instructors at our monthly faculty meetings and the feedback of students in an annual focus group led by a neutral facilitator.

We propose to add two additional assessment and evaluation components:

- Evaluations. K-State First would ask both participating faculty members as well as LCAs to complete evaluations of their experiences in the courses.
- Course observations. Each K-State First course would be observed by a member of the K-State First staff or faculty. Each observation would be followed up with an observation report that would be given to the faculty member observed and to the Co-Directors.

With the advice and support of the Office of Assessment, the Co-Directors would draft an annual summary of assessment efforts and results. This report would be sent to the Provost and the Director of Assessment and made available to interested constituents (e.g., students, families, faculty, administrators, and accrediting and assessment agencies). The Co-Directors and Workgroup would use formative and summative assessment data to propose each year changes and improvements to the program and its courses.

## **Summary and Future Plans**

These seven recommendations are respectfully presented for your consideration. We would be happy to discuss each recommendation in more detail, and we welcome feedback, questions, expressions of concerns, and suggestions.

We understand the current fiscal situation is a challenging one, but we also feel that our current momentum along with the exciting changes in central administration present a unique opportunity for the development of a new university-wide program to improve the academic experience of our first-year students. We are confident, moreover, that the success of the pilot study and the energy of our faculty, staff, and student support provide a solid foundation from which to create a new program.

Pending your approval, we are prepared to launch an aggressive spring campaign to inform prospective students and parents of opportunities available to first-year students. We anticipate the development of appealing K-State specific names for the FYS program, the LC program, and the common reading program. We would create an enhanced website and more comprehensive printed materials. We would look forward to working with the Office of Communications and Marketing on these efforts. We would capitalize on the use of electronic communications in cooperation with the Office of Admission and New Student Services to inform students and parents in a collaborative and sensible way.

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*Important Note:* Parts of this proposal draw on ideas and models provided to the workgroup by the University of Oregon during our site visit on November 5-7, 2009. They are used with kind and generous permission from First-Year Programs at the University of Oregon.

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