



K-STATE FIRST

CAT Community Program Faculty Guide 2012

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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.



CAT Communities

Small student groups with similar interests take courses together



First-Year Seminar

Small classes with lots of interaction



Guide to Personal Success

A K-State professional invests in you and your first-year experience



K-State Book Network

All-university reading program



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, 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 for first-year students, GPS matches a first-year student with a faculty, 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.

In Fall 2011, more than 780 students took K-State First classes. In addition, 3,500+ students were given a copy of the common reading selection, and more than 350 students participated in the GPS mentoring program.

Chapter 2: Purpose of CAT Communities

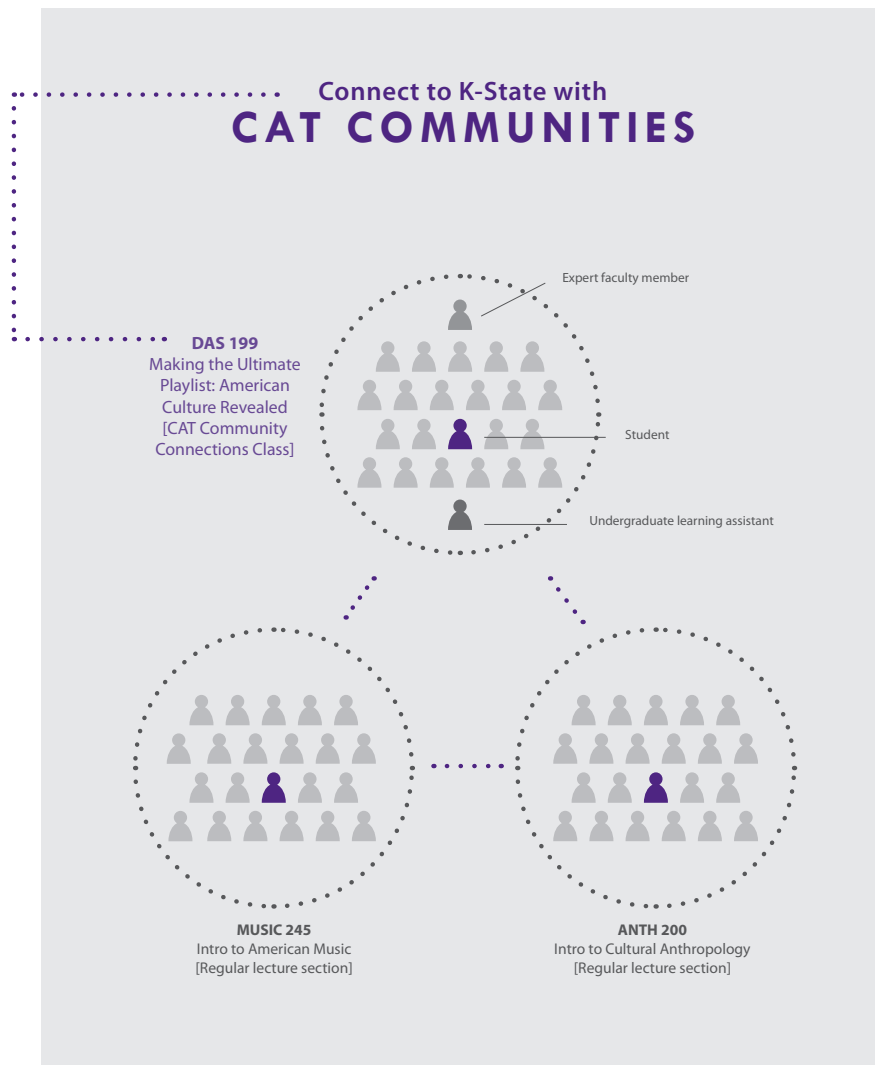
Who We Are

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

CAT Communities only enroll students in their first year 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 program-wide 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, or Learning Assistant (LA). 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 attend the one-hour CAT Community course, help coordinate outside events, 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 program-wide 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

Common Components for All CAT Communities

1. Syllabus including common SLOs
2. An attendance policy
3. Adherence to an active learning pedagogy
4. Participation in common reading program (KSBN)
5. Attendance at co-curricular events

Sample CAT Community Course Description

"The Psychology of Prejudice strives to engage students with similar academic interests in a smaller special topic class. The Psychology of Prejudice course will examine stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination broadly, including where bias comes from and how it may be reduced. In addition, we will discuss general strategies for maximizing your success in college."



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.

Interest-driven CAT Communities

Interest-driven CAT Communities are themed around a variety of academic and social interests, including music, gender, diversity, self-discovery, and American culture. This year's interest-driven CAT Communities are:

- Gender, Diversity, and Morality
- Gender, Race, and Class in American Culture
- Chasing the American Dream
- Making the Ultimate Playlist: American Culture Revealed
- Who Will You Be?
- Understanding the Weather

Pre-professional CAT Communities

Pre-professional CAT Communities engage students with their intended profession early in such fields as engineering, business, law, and pre-physical therapy. This year's pre-professional CAT Communities are:

- The Art of Engineering
- The Business of Hospitality
- The Law and Society
- Pre-Physical Therapy
- Profitability in Livestock Enterprise

Residential CAT Communities

Residential CAT communities provide an opportunity for first-year students to connect with students who share their academic interests by placing them in the same campus residence hall. Like our other CAT Communities, students take a group of classes together, but they live and socialize near each other, too. This year's Residential CAT Communities are:

- The American Story
- The Psychology of Prejudice

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 over Winter Break for an international service-learning opportunity. This year's Study Abroad Community is:

- Spanish in Action (Costa Rica)



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. We can, however, 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 (pre-professional) 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.
3. Use your access to MAPWorks, which provides valuable information about how your students are adjusting.
4. Develop a good working relationship with your Learning Assistant. (See Chapter 4: “Working with a Learning Assistant”)
5. Do something with your students early in the semester. Get some course work 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 Field Trip

Field trips are a great way to get students engaged in their community and apply their learning. Consider taking them to the Beach Museum or an off-campus site within the state. Funding is available to help pay for the cost of your field trip. See page 19 for the funding request form for field trips and other co-curricular events.

Field Trip and Co-Curricular Event Awards

K-State First (KSF) has a fund to support field trips and other out-of-class co-curricular events for students in the CAT Communities and First-Year Seminar courses.

Faculty members may request these funds by completing a short application that provides information about the event and its purpose, date, number of students involved, and anticipated expenses. The kinds of expenses that may be covered include a motor pool vehicle, museum tickets, or certain student research expenses, for example. We will not be able to pay for food or items that might be borrowed without cost, such as video equipment available for checkout from iTAC. Application forms are available from Greg Eiselein (eiselei@k-state.edu) and Emily Lehning (lehning@k-state.edu), or they may be downloaded from the KSF website (www.k-state.edu/first/).

Each KSF event award will cover costs up to \$10 per student per section. Thus, a section of 22 students might receive as much as \$220 for an event. Event awards will be distributed until the fund is exhausted. For any monies that have not been allocated by November 1, a faculty member may apply once for a second award.

Using the KSBN Book

The KSBN book is a great way to open the conversation with your students, since most of them read it over the summer. Consider emailing them before the semester begins and ask them to read the book prior to the first day of class.

The 2012-2013 KSBN selection is *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot.

For specific ideas about using the book, please check out the KSBN Faculty page at <http://www.k-state.edu/ksbn/faculty.html>

Past KSBN books include:

- *Zeitoun*, 2011
- *The Hunger Games*, 2010



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 LA should jump in to your CAT Community, involving themselves in class discussions, sharing about 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, the LA might:

- Organize and lead a study group
- Plan a field trip
- Share their own 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!



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 the LA is 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 the 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?



Chapter 5: Additional Resources

Campus Events and Activities

In order 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.

Week of Welcome: wow.k-state.edu

Landon Lecture Series: www.k-state.edu/lectures/landon

Lou Douglas Lectures: www.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: www.k-state.edu/onestop/

Disability Support Services: www.k-state.edu/dss/

K-State Healthy Decisions: www.k-state.edu/hd/

Counseling Services: www.k-state.edu/counseling/

Office of Student Activities and Services: www.k-state.edu/osas/

Office of Student Life: www.k-state.edu/studentlife/

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.

Optional Textbook Suggestions for Your Course

Bedford/St. Martin's *Insider's Guide to College Etiquette*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2011. Print.

Gardner, John N., A. Jerome Jewler, and Betsy O. Barefoot. *Your College Experience: Strategies for Success*. 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

Harrington, Christine. *Student Success in College: Doing What Works!* 1st ed. Boston: Cengage, 2012.

GENERAL TIMELINE



Learning Assistant Hiring

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

Attend spring KSF orientation



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
- Consider introducing your LA in this email

Send a copy of syllabus to Greg at eiselei@k-state.edu



Sign and return your IDEA form

Events

- Attend K-State First faculty meetings
- Attend program-wide event

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

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



Communicate with LA

- Consider debriefing and evaluating the semester with the LA

Enjoy your break!

K-STATE FIRST | FALL 2012

..... FACULTY CONSENT FORM IDEA REPORTS

K-State First has committed itself to an ongoing study to assess the effects of first-year seminar courses and learning communities on student learning. The seminars and learning communities will be unique in that the maximum enrollment will be 22 students each and limited to first-year students. An emphasis will be placed on communication, critical thinking, and community building.

Your participation in this pilot study will give us the opportunity to utilize end-of-semester student ratings collected via the IDEA System. We intend to use IDEA Reports as part of the endeavor to observe what effects these first-year seminars have on student learning. We will look at individual sections as well as a group report for all sections. No individual faculty member's IDEA Report will be shared with the public. Aggregate findings will be shared with K-State First faculty members, the university community, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, and others (as applicable).

The following person may be contacted with any questions regarding one's rights regarding research protocol: Rick Scheidt, Committee Chair, Institutional Review Board, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, or you may email the Committee Chair at rscheidt@k-state.edu

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I, _____, agree to release a copy of my Fall 2012 IDEA Report for the following course, _____, to the Office of Assessment at Kansas State University. I understand that the Fall 2012 IDEA Report will be used for the purposes designated above for the ongoing study of student learning in K-State First seminars and learning communities. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Director, Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning
Kansas State University
215 Fairchild Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
(785) 532-7828
CATL@k-state.edu

Determining Roles and Responsibilities

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

Role and/or Responsibility	Professor	Learning Assistant	Both
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: <i>Immortal Life</i> , 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

K-State First Request for Field Trip Funding

Contact Information

Faculty Name: _____ Department: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____ Today's Date: _____

Field Trip/Event Information

Class (Course Number and Title): _____

Date(s) of Trip: _____ Location: _____ # of Students: _____

Purpose of Field Trip/Event

Please provide a brief description of your field trip or event, including its purpose within your course and the overall educational benefit of this experience for students.

Costs

Include a list of items for which you are requesting funding. For each item, indicate its cost and briefly describe its educational benefit. (Ineligible items include: food, prizes and gifts, or items that might be borrowed without cost, such as video equipment available for checkout from iTAC.)

Item	Cost	Educational Benefit
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Cost per student: _____

Total Cost of Trip: _____

Signature of Faculty Member: _____

Submit completed form to Greg Eiselein (eiselei@k-state.edu) and Emily Lehning (lehning@k-state.edu). Faculty members may expect to hear a decision about available funds approximately 10 days following the submission of a complete application.



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