

# ***KSU General Education Taskforce Spring 2020 Summary Report***

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## Taskforce Membership

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## Context

When this committee was convened in March 2020, the timeline focused on implementing the redesigned General Education Curriculum in Fall 2021. The timeline of the initial charge reflected an April 15, 2020 deadline, which is when the revised Redesigned General Education model was to be presented to the Board of Regents. During the first month of this committee, the announcement was made that the implementation of the redesigned General Education model would not occur until Fall 2022. After our first meeting the COVID—19 measures moved the committee’s work online. The COVID-19 response also affected the timeline of the revised model, which was not presented in April 2020, and has been postponed until fall. When COVID-19 required the committee to move its work online, this shift, along with the postponed timeline resulted in a more focused discussion of what ideology should underpin the Institutional Options and how these ideas could be distilled into guiding principles and potential models. To achieve better discussion in an online platform, the taskforce was divided into four teams with regular meetings of the team leaders.

## Charge

The initial charge given to the committee asked them to develop guidelines for the two new USG coursework areas in alignment with KSU’s mission and goals for our undergraduate students. These guidelines will be reviewed by an Implementation Committee. The guidelines developed will be the foundation informing the Implementation Committee in the alignment of

proposed and revised coursework in these areas.

When the COVID-19 closure required the committee move its work online, along with the postponed timeline, the taskforce focused on creating consensus points on what the Institutional Options should accomplish and finding models that supported those principles.

## Introduction of the Committee's Work

In response to the USG draft for reformulating system-wide general education requirements, and fully cognizant of the desirability of revisiting core educational experiences at a rapidly growing and evolving comprehensive institution, the provost's office charged the General Education Taskforce with reimagining the university's general education program as a distinctly KSU experience, through careful consideration of the Institutional Options in the draft model of the USG Revision of General Education.

Framed by a system-wide conversation, but nevertheless motivated by a broader desire to find and express a signature general education experience, the General Education Taskforce engaged with national trends in re-envisioning general education programs on college campuses, and identified the following principles for Institutional Options that would manifest the larger ethos of a Kennesaw State University education.

## Principles of Institutional Options

Based on the discussions of the committee members, there was overwhelming support that the Institutional Options should:

- offer students a place to exercise student agency but require that students achieve the learning outcomes of the general education program and Institutional Options.
- allow students to continue to engage with themes and/or reflect a continuation in experiences in other parts of gen ed and/or their program
- include or support interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary experiences
- be a space that allows for experiential or applied learning

There was a minority dissenting perspective to the first point the committee would like to acknowledge. This viewpoint was that students should take specific required courses in the Institutional Options.

## Recommendations for the Institutional Options

Based on the discussions of the committee members, we recommend that any models for Institutional Options should consider the following:

- Themes or pathways that capitalize on KSU's strengths (see Supporting Documentation, II)
- An applied experience that captures/develops a distinct experience

- Producing a product that encourages students to reflect upon their experience
- A model that has a flexible enough foundation to allow for future growth or evolution

## Future Considerations for the Institutional Options

Based on the discussions of this taskforce, the following items need to be incorporated into future discussions of refining and implementing Institutional Options:

- Consider assessment and ensure that it is meaningful.
- Consider transfer students and ensure we are not creating a disconnect or hardship for those students in both the USG and from outside of the USG.
- Consider the expense of implementing applied learning and be wary of mandating such strategies.
- Define what applied learning and/or problem-based learning means for Kennesaw State University.
- Consider all aspects of the chosen model to ensure we are not making new challenges or recreating current challenges or concerns.

## Supporting Documentation, I: Preliminary Models by Group

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### **Model: Themes or pathways that capitalize on KSU's strengths (Group One)**

This model reflects the principles above in the following ways:

This model creates guided paths for students within their programs of study while also allowing for student voice and choice in their coursework.

The model, based on the guiding questions, has the following pros and cons:

Pros: student choice; field-specific learning

Cons: transfer students may be excluded; demand for specific courses may influence faculty workload and which courses we teach.

Future points for further discussion of this model (perhaps consideration necessary for full implementation):

We also found the “Pathway” approach to be of interest. It gives students flexibility and options to consider, given their fields of study. I think the California State University at Chico example (also the Northern Illinois University example) allows students to develop foundation knowledge in different knowledge domains and allows students to select a pathway that best match their interest and perhaps field of study.

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### **Model type: Signature Experience (Group Two)**

**Rationale:** Among the most innovative of the models. This model is appropriate for our purposes since students are required to take just two courses and the themes are attractive. There looks to be general flexibility, which would make it work for exploratory courses. There is great potential to define what makes KSU unique.

The challenge will be in deciding on what themes are appropriate for our university and how courses would be eligible.

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**Model type: Pathways + applied/problem-based learning + multidisciplinary capstone-like experience (Group Three)**

1) Develop pathways in early general education courses, around identified themes and keyed to certain learning outcomes associated with those themes

2) Create 1 or more courses that provide opportunities for students to leverage disciplinary knowledge and skills to address grand challenges/wicked problems/etc.—at perhaps both an early stage (first two years) and a later stage in their academic career (as part of their major/capstone) Rationale: Majority of group argued that general education program needs greater coherence and a distinctive KSU experience—settled on blend of pathways with culminating interdisciplinary experience focused on big problems

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**Model type: Problem based learning model (Group Four)**

Rationale: We think we could create a series that that engages students in systems thinking, an understanding of global and civic engagement with an aspect of experiential or applied learning.

Problem based learning by its nature is systems thinking and should engage students to consider both global problems and local impact and require a practicality/real work approach. In having students grapple with real issues, this makes KSU “more than a major” they are not coming to KSU just to get a degree, but to actively engage in the issues in our communities, country, and world.

We like the Carnegie Mellon model of having students do a day of poster presentations which allow us to demonstrate to ourselves and stakeholders what our students are doing and how are students are uniquely prepared for the workforce.

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**Description of Model: Writing in the Disciplines (WID); Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) (Group One)**

This model reflects the principles above in the following ways: Focus on experiential and applied learning. Can be more interdisciplinary (thinking about field-specific writing course embedded in the major and co-taught/taught in conjunction with writing faculty in general education writing programs (FYC)

Examples: We found that the "Across Curriculum" flags at UT-Austin to be intriguing from a 21st century literacies perspective. "The Skills and Experience Flags are a unique and innovative feature of all undergraduate degrees at The University of Texas at Austin. The Flags are designed to provide the enriched education that all students will need to become effective future leaders in our society and a constantly evolving workplace." The idea that general education has a capstone experience is also appealing, and we could design the institutional options courses (9 hours) and Exploratory Options (9 hours) as tracks for students who want "signature" or research experiences along with the capstone. I think we could combine WID (Writing in Discipline - Across Curriculum) with these individual experiences to produce students who come out of general education at KSU imminently prepared to success in their field-specific academic work.

The model, based on the guiding questions, has the following pros and cons:

Pros: field-specific learning; coursework can be more broadly defined as WID/WAC more so than pathway idea

Cons: transfer students may be excluded

Future points for further discussion of this model (perhaps consideration necessary for full implementation):

The “Across the Curriculum Experience” keeps students engaged with Gen Ed over multiple years, allowing them to nurture and mature their Gen Ed experience as they (themselves) mature in their discipline/major. The University of Florida example we like most in this category as it offers options. We think this approach can be tailored for the new areas under consideration (Exploration and Institutional Identity).

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### **Model type: Pathway (Group Two)**

Rationale: Four Foundational Studies Requirements (four clusters and a max of 15 credits) and 21 credits in various Knowledge Domains OR 21 credits in various Pathways. Combines key system-wide values in foundations, University values through Knowledge Domains, and Dept values through Pathways.

Disciplines from across campus could provide courses that play in the different areas. For example, the Whole student could benefit from courses in wellness, psychology, personal finance. Being a Good Citizen could mean a student knows more about civic engagement, political science, environment, economics, arts.

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### **Model type: Keep current general education distribution model largely intact (Group Three)**

1) For the “Institutional Options,” specify courses/disciplines (or have a small menu of options) of traditional college courses, in order to be able to continue ensuring that KSU students/graduates are exposed to a sufficiently wide array of academic disciplines at the college level

2) If desired, use the “Exploratory Courses” to address grand challenges/wicked problems/etc, while exposing students to different academic disciplines and providing a distinctive KSU experience in this regard

Rationale: This was the strong sentiment of one of our members.

· “What makes a KSU graduate unique?” In contrast to graduates of many colleges and universities around the country, KSU students currently complete a general education core which guarantees exposure to a wide range of academic courses, in-line with the traditional notion of a liberal arts education. Designing a new core which abandons this focus would be a disservice to all of our stakeholders.

· In the report “2019-2020 What Will They Learn?” published by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (<https://www.goacta.org/> and <https://www.whatwilltheylearn.com/>), KSU was one of only 22 schools nationwide (and one of only 4 schools in Georgia – the others are GSU, Morehouse, and UGA) to receive an “A” grade. See the KSU issued press release at <https://news.kennesaw.edu/stories/2019/acta-a-ranking-2019.php>. Of the 20 examples of general education models presented in the “General Education Taskforce Packet,” not a single school earned a grade of “A” in this study (there were: 4 B’s, 7 C’s, 6 D’s, and 3 F’s).

If we do not use the “Institutional Options” to require students to take additional specific college classes in subjects such as mathematics, literature, history, and social sciences, we will

have to reduce the number of credit hours (relative to the current core requirements) in these areas. Many of these courses teach students hard skills and require critical thinking in a way that is highly valued by employers. In a society in which there is increasing income inequality – due in large part to a widening skills gap between workers – we would be exacerbating this problem by moving away from a general education core with a traditional model which guarantees exposure to a wide array of academic disciplines and courses (e.g., in the information age, many high paying jobs require knowledge of mathematics well beyond that which is learned in the 6-8 credit hours in our current core – reducing the exposure to mathematics to only 3 hours would be a tremendous mistake).

· Adopting a traditional model (i.e., something similar to what we currently have) would be prudent, since it requires minimal disruption for everyone. A traditional core is something which we know we can deliver with existing resources (since we have been doing so for decades).

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#### **Model type: Signature Course Experience (Group Four)**

Rationale: This model could include PBL but does not have to. It should focus on looking at issues from disciplinary perspectives, and as students take three courses, they would get three different perspectives. This could also offer opportunities like the iii series at UNC for team teaching or collaboration

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#### **Model type: Pathway (Group Two)**

Rationale: Thematic areas could be covered in one semester or year, in which students took courses from different areas that fit into a theme. These could be any Gen Ed courses. If we defined blocks of courses in this manner, students could be enrolled in the whole block. For first-years, this would ensure them registration for these courses and it would give them a cohort of students to get to know right away. This sort of combines the idea of learning communities, momentum year, pre-scheduling, educational themes, etc. We also talked about identifying three overarching focuses that would make KSU distinct, such as Being a Good Citizen, Educating the Whole Student, and Critical Reasoning / Thinking.

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## Supporting Documentation, II: Preliminary Groupings of What is Special about KSU

### Career/Civic

Adapt to work environment changes

Civic Engagement

Ethical and Conscientious Leaders

Hidden Gem

Life-long learning

Practical Real-world

Strong Under-grad/Grad connection

Work-Ready

## Written Communication

### Experiential/Applied

Adapt to work environment changes  
Apply knowledge and 21st century literacies  
Career Ready  
Engaged and Connected  
Experiential learning  
Experience HIPs  
Practical Real-world  
Supported and Interaction (Faculty accessibility)  
Work-Ready  
Written Communication

### Global/Local

Civic Engagement  
Engaged and Connected  
Exposed to Diversity  
Global  
Hidden Gem  
Life-long learning  
Town/Gown relations are positive  
Well-rounded  
Written Communication

### System Thinking

Access to Many disciplines  
Arts  
Critical Thinking  
Critical Thinking/Creativity/Innovation  
Diverse Audiences/Communication  
Experiential  
Grounded in traditions with contemporary approach  
Hidden Gem  
Innovative  
Interdisciplinary  
Problem-solving  
Strong content knowledge  
Undergrad research w/faculty PIs

## Written Communication

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Misc

Ethical

First-generation

Hardworking

Hidden Gem

Student Well-being (Whole-Learner)