Introduction

What is general education? What purpose does it serve as part of a college education? Should it be a prescribed set of "everyone takes these" core courses? Should it be a list of "choose among these" distribution requirements? These are some of the questions with which the General Education Committee has struggled. The General Education Committee was charged by the KSC Senate in April 2003 to review the 1998 General Education proposal and bring a new proposal to the campus. The Committee has been working since last spring gathering information about models of general education, processes for change, and specific programs. In our research we discovered that:

“General education has always been a central part of the American baccalaureate degree. As disciplinary specialization grew throughout the twentieth century, general education has been the program that assures that all students – regardless of specialization or intended career – become acquainted with history and culture and with science and mathematics. It is also a major vehicle for cultivating capacities such as communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and integration of knowledge.” (AACU, 2000, 5)

We decided to accept the definition of general education as:

"the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities". (Schneider, 2004a, 9)

As we conducted more research, we recognized that general education differs dramatically across campuses. On some campuses students can "test out" of general education requirements. On others, a set of core courses is required of everyone. Some campuses require students to engage in co-curricular activities such as concert and lecture attendance. At some institutions there is no overlap between general education and major curricula; on other campuses students may take introductory or other courses in the major and have them "count" towards general education. Even the terms utilized for general education differed widely: General Education, Liberal Education, Distribution Requirements, The Core, the Hamilton Plan, Wittenberg Plan, Kalamazoo's K-Plan, Master Academic Plan (MAP), etc. We used this information to guide us in making choices that we believe seem right for Keene State College.
We also read several meta-analyses of trends in general education and specifically looked at the type and number of course and experiential requirements.

"The list of commonly endorsed outcomes includes communication, inquiry/analysis, integrative learning, community/citizenship, ethics/values, global/multicultural learning, breadth of knowledge, lifelong learning, and the personal capacities to work successfully in contexts of collaboration and change. … A liberal education also should foster deep understandings of society, self, culture, history, and the natural world." (Schneider, 2004b, 3)

We also used this information to help us in crafting a plan that reflected national trends, yet also met the needs of our students and our institution and its faculty.

In developing this proposal, we gathered information from both outside the campus and within. We looked at who we are – our students, faculty, institution and our region. We read previous proposals, and listened to many individuals and constituent groups. We then took to heart the advice of our Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) consultant Dr. Ann Ferren that we gather a lot of information and then develop a program of general education that is "KSC's own". Therefore, we present to you our proposal for the Keene Academic Plan – KAP.

**Who We Are**

According to the AAC&U all successful general education programs are designed in accordance with an institution’s mission. The AAC&U claims that “a general curriculum consisting of loose distribution requirements –the most common structure—may assure a degree of breadth for students, but it may not reflect the distinctive mission of the institution” (1994, 7).

Keene State College’s mission is to “provide and maintain an intellectual environment grounded in the liberal arts that fosters both the personal and professional growth of our students” (KSC, 2003a, 8). We are a publicly-funded college, a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), and value “strong relationships among students, faculty, and staff that emphasize creative and critical thinking, scholarship and research, and a passion for learning” (KSC, 2003a, 8). The proposed Keene Academic Plan (KAP), with its emphasis on intellectual exploration and on learning in and across diverse disciplines, reflects our mission and our values as an institution. In addition, KAP recognizes the multiple curricular and institutional efforts in which the campus has been engaged. Multicultural and diversity initiatives, the work of the Writing Task Force, interdisciplinary and four credit curricular proposals, and development of service learning opportunities, among others, influenced the direction and details of the proposal.

**Who Our Students Are**
The AAC&U (1994) strongly recommends that general education programs “attend carefully to student experience” (22) by “meeting students where they are and helping them find new perspectives on their lives in the curriculum” (25). Since we at Keene State value student/faculty connections, it is important to create a general education program that, as the AAC&U puts it, “is designed to close the inevitable gap between faculty intentions and student experiences” (26).

Many of our students are NH and New England residents, of traditional age, white, of “middle range” academic standing, and don’t necessarily view themselves as strong students. Many of our students are first-generation college students; many hold jobs in addition to attending college.

We know what students say about their experience at Keene State. According to the 2003 Keene State College Senior Survey (KSC, 2003b), students felt the least prepared to deal with a diverse world. They expressed that they were least confident about “reading and speaking a foreign language” and “understanding their own cultural background and place in history.” The seniors of 2003 claimed to be least prepared in “general knowledge” areas, including the world of letters, the natural world, and the world of arts. Students also felt least prepared to “reason quantitatively.” On the other hand, Keene State seniors overwhelmingly endorsed the statement that KSC faculty are helpful, accessible, and friendly. They believe themselves to have an in-depth understanding of their major field and to be able to function well with little supervision.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)(KSC, 2002), which compares Keene State students to other COPLAC colleges, shows that Keene State students were less likely than students at other COPLAC colleges to have had “serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own.” Keene State students were less likely than students at comparable institutions to “have serious conversations with students who were different from them in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.” Students from Keene State demonstrated less ability than students at other COPLAC schools to “synthesize and organize ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships” and were not as able to “make judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods.” On the other hand, Keene State students are much more likely to have contributed to class discussions or asked questions in class than students at other COPLAC institutions.

The above information was utilized to propose that the KAP provide students with opportunities to acquire a breadth of knowledge, develop writing and quantitative reasoning, and interact intellectually with faculty members. KAP also focuses on diversity and emphasizes connecting ideas learned in the classroom to other contexts. In so doing, KAP addresses national concerns, as well our institutional mission and our student needs.

**Keene Academic Plan - KAP**
We propose that general education at KSC be referred to as the Keene Academic Plan (KAP), representing the uniqueness of the program and its special relationship to our broader mission and goals. The general education component of the curriculum is designed to foster intellectual and personal growth, and encompasses Academic skills, Breadth of knowledge, Connections between oneself and the community, and Diversity and global awareness. All departments, programs, and faculty on campus are invited to propose any existing or new course to be approved as KAP eligible. As they complete the KAP requirements, students will:

- Use writing as a tool for intellectual exploration, communication, and creative expression
- Use quantitative reasoning as a tool for problem solving, analysis, and interpretation of data
- Use information literacy and research skills to gather and locate information, evaluate and assess it, and effectively utilize and interpret the results
- Use oral communication skills to persuade, inform, and create
- Develop broad knowledge of social systems, arts, humanities, natural sciences, and physical sciences
- Construct knowledge from diverse perspectives, including alternatives to the dominant discourses as well as global and interdisciplinary approaches.
- Apply knowledge learned in the classroom to other contexts

KAP recognizes the importance of academic skills, such as writing, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, oral presentation, and reflection, and infuses these skills throughout the entire academic experience. It acknowledges the importance of breadth of knowledge and exposure to the traditional liberal arts disciplines to complement one’s major area of concentration. It recognizes the complex, interdependent world in which graduates will live and work through coursework focused on diverse perspectives, and it supports students to make connections between academic and personal knowledge and experience.

The KAP will build throughout the student’s college experience, beginning with the academic skills and breadth courses, and culminating with the diversity and connections courses. Transfer students will be able to meet KAP requirements with courses from their previous institutions, following equivalency procedures developed by the KAP Curriculum Committee and the Elliot Center. Students will have flexibility, as they can choose courses within each component and thus will have increased motivation and interest in the KAP courses they select. Departments will also have the opportunity to require certain courses in the breadth section of the KAP that are outside the major but complement the major requirements or serve as prerequisites. In addition, two courses that meet KAP goals in the diversity and connections areas can also be specified as requirements of the major.

**THE PROPOSAL**

(Catalog Language)
The Keene Academic Plan (KAP) reflects the unique character of Keene State College as well as the research literature and the experiences of peer liberal arts institutions. The design challenges students to: develop essential academic skills; expand their breadth of academic expertise and experience; make connections between what they are learning and the realities of community life; and become citizens of the world who can take diverse perspectives and cultivate global awareness.

The “ABCD” components of the Keene Academic Plan are designed to offer students widening circles of educational experience, from the individual to the global. Thus students who complete the KAP will have practiced the skills of writing and quantitative reasoning that are considered fundamental to the educated person, engaged in successful learning experiences across a breadth of disciplines, prepared for participation in an increasingly diverse world, and integrated their learning experiences, both within and outside of the traditional classroom. They will do so in ways that are unique to each student and that are woven across their years at Keene State College.

A. Academic Skills: One course in each of the following (total of two)
   1) Writing
   Note: writing is a primary focus; additional writing intensive courses are required below
   2) Quantitative reasoning
   Note: course content focuses on quantitative reasoning; may be in disciplines other than mathematics

B. Breadth: A total of five courses selected from at least four of the following areas:
   Note: information literacy and research skills are embedded in the curriculum; these courses must be outside of one's major and can be survey or in-depth topics
   1) Social sciences and systems
   2) Arts
   3) Humanities
   4) Natural sciences
   5) Physical sciences

C. Connections: A total of two courses, each with at least one of the following goals:
   Note: significant reflective writing and oral presentation must be required; at least one of these courses must be outside of the major
   1) Learning beyond the classroom: service learning, field experiences, etc
   2) Learning about personal growth, health, and wellness
   3) Learning between and among the disciplines

C. Diversity: A total of two courses that include both of the following as learning goals
   Note: at least one of these courses must be outside of the major; may include independent or directed study if appropriate
1) Construction of knowledge, incorporating alternatives to the dominant discourses and global perspectives
2) Clear well reasoned thinking as expressed in writing

(end of catalog language)

**Rationale for KAP Components**

**A. Academic Skills**

Academic skills provide the foundation on which one builds knowledge. Without solid academic skills the ability to acquire, evaluate, utilize, create, and enjoy knowledge is severely compromised. Although our students come to us well prepared in many academic skill areas, most of our students have not had the opportunity to apply those skills in the demanding context of higher education. Of all the many possible academic skills, we chose writing, quantitative reasoning, information literacy and research skills, and oral communication as particularly important to KSC and to our students. The latter two we believe are best developed when infused within another course and as such are required to be part of the curriculum in the B – Breadth courses and C – Connections courses. The first two, writing and quantitative reasoning are included in the A – Academic Skills part of KAP for the following reasons:

There has been much research on the positive impact of clear writing on clear thinking. If we are to develop our students' reasoning and critical thinking abilities, we must make writing a central focus for all students. The same is true of quantitative reasoning skills – the more capable a student is with understanding and interpreting quantitative information, the more well reasoned are their conclusions about and use of that information. Courses that are approved for these two KAP components do not necessarily have, respectively, English or Mathematics prefixes; however course content and pedagogy must be approved by the KAP Curriculum Committee.

**B. Breadth**

The breadth component of KAP is familiar, since it gives a nod towards the distribution requirements of the old program, yet different, since it invites a rethinking of some familiar terms and categories. In the five categories, no department is singled out for required courses. Instead, departments will want to consider a different fluidity of our familiar disciplinary distinctions. No school in the college is excluded from the Breadth requirements. Instead, all disciplines will rethink and present their courses to the KAP Curriculum Committee for KAP inclusion. With its commitment to the liberal arts grounding of the college and student experience, the committee carefully considered the number and selection of courses in the Breadth component, recognizing that the content areas designated in Breadth would also inform both the Connections and the Diversity components. As NSSE findings demonstrate, and as current information literacy scholarship indicates, our students will benefit from an infusion of information literacy and research skills in Breadth courses.
C. Connections

The college’s statement of Campus Values includes the importance of service to the community, lifelong learning, and a healthy balance between mind and body (catalog p. 8). The KAP plan supports these campus values through the requirement of what we have called Connections courses. Connections courses are designed: to examine the intersections and relationships between and among the traditional disciplines; to engage the student in learning that connects to the community and larger world; to encourage civic engagement; and/or to foster a deep understanding of the self. Keene State College has been involved in service learning initiatives for many years, and many majors already require internships or practicum experiences. Brain research indicates that learning is facilitated when the learner is emotionally engaged; personal experience can provide a mechanism for this engagement. Reflection and self-knowledge are hallmarks of the well-educated person. New knowledge is often created at the boundaries between the traditional academic disciplines (e.g. neuroscience, American studies, health science).

The Connections requirement means that all students will have the opportunity to explore the connections between their academic career and their life experience. Each Connections course will include reflective writing and oral presentation in order to provide a focused arena for developing and practicing skills in oral communication within a specific subject or experience. By including the option of one Connections course in the major and at least one outside of the major, the KAP recognizes the value of learning beyond the traditional discipline and classroom boundaries as a transition to learning after and beyond the college years.

D. Diversity

Researchers and others writing in the higher education literature about liberal arts education generally agree that

“…being a patriotic American entails being a citizen of the world… Being a cosmopolitan entails knowing how the actions of one’s government and oneself affect the global balance of wealth, power, and quality of life. It means pursuing intercultural skills and the capacity to imagine multiple points of reference in assessing a situation. (Stoddard and Cornwell, 2004, 44)

As our own NSSE results conclude, Keene State College students have fewer opportunities than those at other COPLAC colleges to dialogue with and learn from students of different races and ethnicities or those who have different opinions, beliefs, and values. They are less prepared to understand and take multiple perspectives into account as they make decisions about their communities and their government. The Diversity requirement in the KAP addresses these limitations and concerns by requiring two courses that will challenge students to understand the development of their own perspectives and to understand perspectives that are different from their own, particularly those not commonly presented in mainstream media or in their day to day interactions with other students. Because writing can effectively facilitate the complex thinking that
is so vital, it is a component of the diversity requirement. There are already many courses offered on campus that meet the criteria, and courses in any of the schools may qualify, including study abroad and other existing experiences available to students.

References

http://www.aacu.org/issues/generaleducation/

http://www.aacu.org/issues/generaleducation/

Keene State College (2003a). Undergraduate and graduate catalog. Keene, NH.

Keene State College (2003b). Senior survey. Keene, NH. 
http://www.keene.edu:8001/ir/sensur03.pdf

Keene State College (2002). NSSE survey results. Keene, NH. 

http://www.aacu-edu.org/liberaleducation/index.cfm

http://www.aacu-edu.org/liberaleducation/index.cfm


KAP Administrative Oversight

A KAP Curriculum Committee will be charged with supporting the administration and assessment of the KAP. This Committee shall be composed of representatives from the Writing Task Force, Diversity Commission, Experiential Learning Task Force, the Senate Curriculum Committee, and appointees from each Dean, the Library Director and from the VPAA. The KAP Curriculum Committee will report to the Senate. For a course to be designated as eligible for KAP, it must be nominated by departments or individuals to the Committee and approved by a majority vote. Interdisciplinary course proposals are particularly encouraged. All KAP courses must be three or more credits.
KAP Assessment

KAP will be assessed using a wide variety of assessment strategies including analysis of student growth from beginning to the end of the semester, analysis of sophistication and accuracy in written and oral work, types of reading, writing and presentation assignments, student self report, etc. As one example, selected samples of student work, individual and small group interviews of current students, as well as alumni, and syllabus analysis would be utilized to answer the following types of potential assessment questions:

How did the level and complexity of writing change from the beginning to the end of the semester?
How quickly and accurately were students able to analyze quantitative information from a text?
How many pages of reading were students required to read on average per semester?
How many pages of writing were students required to complete on average per semester?
How well can students critically interpret a piece of information using research tools at their disposal?
How well can students connect a current event or issue to a finding, theory, piece of information, or interpretation learned outside of their major coursework?
# KAP Phase In Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Sprig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>Writing courses</td>
<td>Writing courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative reasoning courses</td>
<td>Quantitative reasoning courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify breadth courses from existing catalog</td>
<td>Identify breadth courses from existing catalog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Identify diversity and connections courses</td>
<td>Identify breadth courses from existing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop additional writing and quant reasoning courses</td>
<td>Develop additional writing and quant reasoning courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Develop additional breadth courses</td>
<td>Develop additional breadth courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop additional diversity and connections courses</td>
<td>Develop additional diversity and connections courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Full implementation – revise, new course ideas, examine assessment data</td>
<td>Full implementation – revise, new course ideas, examine assessment data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Example of a 4 year student plan for KAP

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Writing or Quantitative reasoning 1 breadth 2 other courses – in major or exploration</td>
<td>Quantitative reasoning or writing 1 breadth 2 other courses – in major or exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sophomore</td>
<td>1 breadth 1 diversity 2 other courses in major or exploration</td>
<td>1 breadth 1 connection 2 other courses – in major or exploration</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4 courses in major or electives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior</td>
<td>1 connection or diversity this year 3 other courses in major or electives</td>
<td>4 courses in major or electives</td>
</tr>
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