Academic and Co-Curricular Plan

Keene State College
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Introduction

Keene State College has facilitated an inclusive, community-wide process to develop an integrated academic and co-curricular plan, a conceptual and practical keystone of the College’s new strategic plan.¹ The first goal of the strategic plan addresses the identity of the College and the distinguishing features of its liberal arts education:

*Keene State College will provide a distinctive, rigorous, and primarily residential liberal arts education characterized by (1) the intentional integration of learning across the college experience; (2) progressive, engaged, and evidence-based pedagogy; (3) the development of workplace readiness; and (4) the achievement of desired college-wide student learning outcomes.*

The first objective under that goal states that the College will:

*Prepare a comprehensive, integrated academic and co-curricular plan that (1) is guided by College-wide student learning outcomes; (2) incorporates an interdisciplinary general education curriculum that exemplifies and embraces Keene State’s definition of the liberal arts; (3) supports innovative, experiential, and integrated educational opportunities that respond to a spectrum of students’ learning styles; and (4) includes expanded opportunities for international engagement and study, service learning, undergraduate research, internships, and artistic creation.*

To address that objective, the College has developed an integrated academic and co-curricular plan that will be linked to, and form the foundation and framework for, many of the strategic plan’s goals and objectives. Completion and implementation of the integrated academic and co-curricular plan are prerequisites for implementation of several other components of the strategic plan; accordingly, the College has developed the integrated academic and co-curricular plan in coordination with other planning tasks and functions that are essential to achieving several of the College’s strategic objectives.

The initial focus of the integrated academic and co-curricular plan—*Focus on the First Year Student*—reflects the recommendation of the Academic and Co-Curricular Planning Council (ACPC) that the plan should have an immediate, positive, and visible

¹ For a complete description of the activities that supported and led to the development of the plan, please see the section “Project Activities” located at the end of this document.
impact on student recruitment, engagement, retention, and success during the first year of college. The implementation plan that accompanies this document presents the specific activities recommended in support of the plan. Below, we describe the activities and research that informed the ACPC’s decision-making process; note important overarching themes and concerns that arose during the process of ACPC’s work; list high-priority first-year activities as recommended by ACPC; and present guiding criteria that can be used to support the development of future integrated academic and co-curricular programs and activities.

**Overarching Planning Themes**

In addition to the activities and programs that emerged during the planning process and described in this document, the ACPC identified the following general, overarching themes that should be taken into consideration as the integrated plan is implemented:

- The Keene State student—as a whole person—must be the first priority in the academic and co-curricular plan. Activities and programs should contribute to all dimensions of a student’s development and help them identify ways to link learning inside and outside of the classroom.

- The College must ensure equitable access for all students to activities and programs developed as part of the integrated plan. Integrated experiences should not be hindered by inequity and should be accessible in all ways to all students. (This is applicable to all activities and should be addressed as part of the diversity strategic plan, described below.)

- The College needs to develop a shared understanding of and definitions for signature terms pertinent to the academic and co-curricular plan, including a definition for what constitutes a co-curricular experience. The ACPC proposes the following working definition:

  "Co-curricular refers to any opportunity or experience that promotes student learning beyond the classroom and/or contributes to or enhances the learning that occurs within the classroom. Examples may include, but are not limited to, leadership experiences with student organizations and/or employers, community service and service learning, travel experiences, and athletics and recreational pursuits."
In addition, the need for definitions also applies in particular to advising, enrollment management, internships, first year experience, diversity and multiculturalism, and liberal arts—all of which the ACPC and most participants in campus meetings agreed must be understood and applied broadly as the integrated plan is implemented. The ACPC identified this as a priority for all individual planning groups to address and communicate as they continue their work during Spring 2016.

- Ensure that policies, procedures, and paperwork at Keene State do not undermine efficiency and innovation. Many faculty and staff noted that they are hampered in, or have been discouraged from, developing learning experiences outside of the classroom (such as internships, field experiences, or international travel) because of the administrative impediments to implementing them, many of which are based in risk management. Student groups described similar challenges developing activities and programs that could serve as co-curricular opportunities not currently provided by the College, including but not limited to multicultural and interfaith experiences. The ACPC identified this as a priority for the Keene State Cabinet and other leadership to address, and recommends that all offices review their policies and procedures to ensure they promote the development of future integrated and innovative programming.

- Explore innovative ways to increase support for faculty and staff research, scholarship, and creative works to stimulate a vibrant intellectual culture at Keene State. Professional activities by faculty and staff are important to creating and linking academic and co-curricular experiences for students, and this includes co-curricular activities that may not be part of an existing departmental program.

- Utilize examples of academic and co-curricular programs in some of the College’s student activities. Identify models for future programs using the guiding criteria in this document, as well as the comparative research study and program inventory that were completed during the development of the integrated plan.

- Create opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to collaborate. As described in the summary of Spring 2016 activities, the ACPC recommends that departments and programs meet and explore potential opportunities for collaboration that will have an impact on first year students in Fall 2016, as preparation for a discussion in May 2016 to determine how to implement those activities; the May summit will be an annual opportunity to discuss collaboration. More generally, the College should foster an
expanded mindset for and approach to academic and Student Affairs work that raises awareness of the benefits of integrated work to students where appropriate. To help break down silos between academic and student affairs, the College should develop community-building events and programs that bring faculty, staff, and students together and provide sufficient space to integrate academic and co-curricular activity.

- The College should require assessment of all programs that are implemented as part of the integrated plan. The College should better utilize data in making decisions about and assessing the effectiveness of existing and new programs.

- Perform an annual review of the academic and co-curricular plan and refresh the overall endeavor as required; the review should be led by a group with a similar, broadly representational composition to the ACPC.

**Foundational Concern: Faculty and Staff Time and Work**

Over the course of campus planning conversations, a fundamental “meta-theme” emerged concerning faculty and staff time and work. The new plan will fail if (1) faculty and staff do not have sufficient time or resources to engage with students because of other demands on their time, including governance responsibilities; (2) the complement of full-time faculty and staff in departments or programs is insufficient to carry out new initiatives; (3) resources and support for faculty and staff research, scholarship, and creative works, which are necessary for both high quality teaching and undergraduate research opportunities, are inadequate or inequitable across programs; or (4) appropriate professional development is not provided for both full-time and adjunct faculty and staff.

The ACPC recommends that the College make a commitment to ensure an adequate complement of faculty and advisors, including replacements if positions are vacated. Activities and programs described in the plan should not add more demands for faculty and staff whose time is already very constrained and for whom professional development is limited. This foundational concern is reflected and addressed in a number of the overarching planning themes and recommended Spring 2016 activities.
Academic and Co-Curricular Plan

During its planning retreat on December 17, 2015, the ACPC recommended that the College take action in January 2016, as soon as the new academic year has begun, to put in place a group of high-priority activities as initial steps in the implementation of Keene State’s new integrated academic and co-curricular plan. Additional activities identified in the plan will be developed in future years to benefit students throughout their entire experience at Keene State. The implementation table includes all activities suggested as part of the plan; for the group of high priority activities scheduled for launch in 2016, the table includes timelines and sequencing, assignments of responsibility and accountability (currently TBD), and the most important implementation steps.

Keene State will appoint two individuals—one faculty member, and one staff member in Student Affairs—to oversee the overall implementation of the ACPC’s Focus on the First Year Student leading into Fall 2016. Individuals or small working groups—also bridging the faculty and staff—will be responsible for each of the specific activities. Members of the faculty and staff will be asked to serve on these groups at the beginning of the Spring 2016 semester so that program development may begin immediately.

Spring 2016 Activities: Focus on the First Year Student

- Develop a map to illustrate how and where the College-Wide Learning Outcomes can be achieved. Departments and programs (both academic and in Student Affairs) will be asked to identify the programs, activities, and other learning experiences they offer that can help students achieve the CWLOs and to provide information about access to, the availability of, and the recommended timing of those experiences. The College will develop communications and interactive graphic tools with which to present the map to incoming students in Fall 2016.

- Assign an advisor to every student during their first year, including undeclared students, and provide training and support to all faculty and staff who will advise first year students. Definition of advising roles and responsibilities will take place during the Spring 2016 semester, so that training and professional development for this cohort of advisors may be developed and provided prior to the arrival of new students.
Implement an Early Alert system. To begin, the College will create a process through which to identify students at risk and provide a way for faculty or staff to report concerns and ensure follow up. This process will be in place by Fall 2016, using current systems and technology; the College will identify and install appropriate software to provide a better technological framework for the process after 2016/2017. To support this activity, the College will reanimate an existing working group (including both faculty and staff) on Early Alert.

Increase the number of Living-Learning Communities (LLCs). The LLC Task Force is reviewing applications for LLCs to launch in Fall 2016; Keene State will support these as activities related to our Focus on the First Year Student. The College will ensure that there is equitable access for all first year students who wish to participate in an LLC.

Identify and address high priority items from the Campus Climate Survey (Strategic Plan Action 4.1.3); this includes, but is not limited to, matters of safety for female students on- and off-campus, and the needs of transgender students.

Develop a campus-wide strategic plan for diversity. The Chief Officer of Diversity and Multiculturalism is currently re-evaluating an earlier version of a diversity strategic plan, prepared in 2010. Thereafter, representatives of both faculty and staff will work to revise or update the plan, as needed. The updated diversity plan should have shared ownership by all campus constituents—faculty, staff, and students—and address recruitment, programming, and professional development, and promote existing and new systems that support first year students.

Implement health and wellness activities as part of first year programming for new students. This will begin by working with faculty who teach courses to first year students, and with Student Affairs professional staff whose programs, services, and activities provide many opportunities for student engagement, to help first year students develop health and wellness-promoting habits and become aware of available resources. Specific activities may be modeled around the eight dimensions of wellness.

Consider a first year course in the revision of the Integrated Studies Program. ACPC recommended that the current Integrated Studies Program Committee (ISPC) consider and determine whether to institute an ISP First Year Course (possibly two credits) to be
developed for implementation in Fall 2018. ISPC should begin discussions during Spring 2016, and, assuming there is a decision to proceed, devote 2016/2017 to designing the course and submit a proposal for curriculum approval for Fall 2017.

In addition to the activities listed above, all departments and programs will be encouraged to think about what they might do differently to benefit students during their first year on campus, and where opportunities for collaboration between faculty and staff are possible. Time will be devoted during spring planning meetings, in late May 2016, to discuss opportunities that were identified and how to implement them during the new academic year. More generally, to support ongoing development of academic and co-curricular activities, Keene State must provide opportunities for faculty and staff to come together and explore collaboration, and provide the infrastructure to support these opportunities (as further described in an overarching planning theme below).

Additional Activities

During open forum discussions in Fall 2015, the policies, processes, and procedures for allocation of new or replacement faculty lines and the needs of, demand for, and effectiveness of graduate programs emerged as important concerns. The following activities are additional opportunities available for immediate implementation that will directly or indirectly benefit the integrated plan.

Allocation of Faculty Lines

About a third of full-time faculty will be eligible for retirement in the next five to ten years, so the College must determine how new and replacement faculty positions will be organized, prioritized, and assigned. The faculty cannot be strategically designed on an individual basis, using the mechanisms of hiring, reappointment, promotion, and tenure; instead, the College needs a systematic approach that aligns individual faculty personnel processes with Keene State’s broader academic goals.

Conversations during open forums on this topic revealed that there is neither an established, consistent process for, nor clear communication and transparency about, how these decisions are currently made. Early in the Spring 2016 semester, the Provost will convene a group of academic deans and department chairs to recommend a policy and
process that will serve the College well while responding to concerns and suggestions that emerged during the open forums. Those suggestions included the following:

- Develop, with faculty input, a matrix for decision-making that articulates the criteria for allocating faculty lines, the data required to assess proposals against those criteria, and how decisions will be made and communicated, including who—faculty, chairs, deans, the Provost, the President—is involved, and when.

- Consider what information is truly valuable and required in proposals for faculty positions, bearing in mind (1) the demands on faculty time to prepare these proposals, and (2) the context in which proposals will be submitted—faculty who prepare these proposals in any year should know before doing so the extent to which the College will have resources to fund new or replacement positions.

- Make both proposals and decisions transparent and available for review; enable chairs and faculty to have conversations before proposals are deliberated so that they can be aware of the challenges in other departments and work together to achieve compromises if necessary.

- Ensure that data used for decision-making accurately reflect the numerous variables that impact faculty demand in departments, including but not limited to the fluctuating number of student majors, the number of advisees, ISP courses and electives offered and taught, program and accreditation needs, and departmental service needs. Both proposals and decisions should consider projections for future and long-term department needs.

- Invite faculty to attend, as silent observers, any meetings in which proposals and allocations are deliberated.

**Graduate Programs**

There is broad concern, especially among faculty in Professional and Graduate Studies, about the College’s commitment to graduate programs; the lack of attention to infrastructure, systems, and resources to support them creates problems for faculty, staff, and students. In several areas, accreditation requirements and/or professional standards
will soon mandate master's level degrees; if Keene State does not offer programs to meet those requirements, or offer fifth-year master's programs in other areas, it will lose students to competing institutions.

As an immediate next step, during the Spring 2016 semester, the College will:

- Examine existing undergraduate programs that have an accreditation requirement mandating the development of graduate programs (including athletic training and dietetics).
- Assess and strengthen the effectiveness of graduate programs.

Additional, future planning steps are identified in the implementation plan.

**Criteria for Developing Academic and Co-Curricular Programs and Activities**

As members of campus are encouraged to convene and explore other opportunities to improve the first year student experience, and develop integrated academic and co-curricular programming more generally, the ACPC discussed and drafted a set of criteria to help provide a framework for deliberation and decision-making. This framework is intended primarily as a guide to help generate creative and collaborative thinking; programs and activities need not satisfy all of the criteria described below.

**Learning Outcomes**

- Would the program or activity optimize or improve student learning?
- Would it help students achieve one or more of the College Wide Learning Outcomes?
- Would it help students recognize the intrinsic connection between their liberal arts education and career preparation?
- Would it help prepare students to live a meaningful personal life—such as making healthy choices, developing interests and passions, etc.?
- Would it help prepare students to live a socially responsible, engaged civic life?
- Would it expand intercultural competence, understanding of cultural differences, and experience of diversity?
- Would it develop students intellectually and affectively?
Program or Activity Characteristics

- Could this program or activity be applied incrementally and enable students to build upon what they learn and experience over time?
- Could this program or activity benefit from a variety of experiences and/or range of options at different times, so that more students from different backgrounds or majors, and at different points in personal development, would be able to participate and benefit? (This relates to the importance of equitable access for all students.)
- Would this program or activity incorporate elements of reflection by students and prepare them to articulate the value of the experience?
- Is it likely that students’ participation in this program or activity would enhance retention?
- Could participation in this program or activity be documented by students in an academic and/or co-curricular transcript or e-portfolio?
- Does the program offer growth opportunities, allowing students to take on increased responsibility over time?
- Does the program reach groups not served by other programs?
- How can barriers be reduced to help faculty and staff develop and implement the program or activity?

Collaboration and Communication

- Would the program or activity facilitate intentional collaboration between faculty and staff in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs?
- Would the values, vocabulary, and communications about the program or activity be easily understood by faculty, staff, and students?
- Could this program or activity be used as a distinctive feature in recruiting students to Keene State?
- Is common, shared language a necessity?
- Would the program be better than if a single unit/group/division was responsible?
- Would a collaborative effort be more efficient because of shared expertise and work assignment?
- Does implementation require broad campus cooperation and participation?
- Would this be able to be incorporated as a curricula element?
Additional Recommendations

- Consider ways in which the integrated plan can become part of the structure of the College; faculty and staff should refer to the strategic plan and academic and co-curricular plan in annual reports and consider other ways to institutionalize and systematize integrated activities.
- Consider other ways of capturing and cataloging integrated activities, and develop methods of communicating opportunities to incoming, returning students faculty, staff, parents, and prospective students and parents.
- Develop online discussion forums or other interactive means to allow for exchange of ideas and solicitation of collaborations in the future.
- As programs and activities are developed, ensure that budgets, individuals responsible, and desired outcomes are identified.

Implementation Plan Description

The attached implementation plan encapsulates the results of deliberations by the ACPC during its December 2015 retreat. Rows are organized according to the categories of planning themes that emerged during Fall 2015 conversations. The columns are organized as follows:

- The first column identifies activities that the ACPC recommended as priorities to develop during Spring 2016, for implementation by Fall 2016, in order to have an immediate impact on first year students.
- The second column illustrates the ACPC’s recommendation that a faculty member and a Student Affairs staff member to be assigned to lead, collaboratively, in the development of Focus on the First Year Student activities; individual appointments area being announced early in the Spring semester, and any unassigned roles as of the date of this document are marked “TBD.” An additional column notes other collaborating groups and offices.
- The third column lists important initial implementation steps, as identified by the ACPC and College leadership.
- The fourth column identifies activities that the ACPC recommends for future implementation, after 2016/2017 and the successful deployment of initial Focus on the First Year Student activities.
Project Activities

To provide the foundation for the academic and co-curricular planning process in Fall 2015, the College worked with its consultants, Keeling & Associates (K&A), to help facilitate the following preliminary activities during Summer 2015:

- **Initial Organizational and Planning Retreat:** On June 15, 2015, K&A organized and facilitated a one-day retreat with the President, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (VPSA), and Co-Chairs of the ACPC to differentiate roles and responsibilities, map the planning and community engagement process, formulate a timeline and work plan for the summer and fall, and discuss critical issues and current or emerging opportunities to be considered in creating the plan.

- **Executive Planning Group:** The President named, convened, and charged an Executive Planning Group, comprised of the ACPC co-chairs, Provost, VPSA, and the chairs of other connected and pertinent planning groups, with ensuring full and comprehensive alignment of the work of all the committees and groups assigned to address elements of the strategic plan that are linked to the integrated academic and co-curricular plan.

- **Comparative Institutional Research:** K&A completed a comprehensive benchmarking study of ways in which a group of peer and aspirational institutions have integrated academic and co-curricular programs and services; the list of comparator institutions and categories of investigation were determined in consultation with the ACPC Co-Chairs. K&A finalized and submitted a summary of the comparative research on July 30, 2015.

- **Exemplary Programs:** As a supplement to the comparative research study and to provide Keene State with additional examples and aspirations, K&A also researched the existence of integrated academic and co-curricular programming at other institutions. K&A submitted a summary of findings on August 21, 2015.

- **Draft Comprehensive Project Work Plan:** K&A drafted comprehensive project work plan for Fall 2015, including a detailed timeline and specification of milestones and dates for major events, and submitted it to the ACPC Co-Chairs on August 21, 2015.
During Fall 2015, the College worked with K&A to facilitate the following core activities as part of the academic and co-curricular planning process:

- **Academic and Co-Curricular Planning Council (ACPC):** In September 2015, the College announced the establishment of the ACPC, which was comprised of approximately 19 appointed and elected members of the campus community—faculty, staff, and students. The ACPC was charged with coordinating and advancing the process of designing the integrated academic and co-curricular plan during Fall 2015.

- **Program Inventory Survey:** K&A worked with the ACPC to create an inventory of existing programs that should be identified, described, and considered in discussion of the academic and co-curricular plan. A survey to gather program information was shared via e-mail with staff in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs & Enrollment Management in late August and September, and the ACPC Co-Chairs and K&A gathered additional program information during on-campus meetings in September and October. K&A submitted a final summary of findings on November 13, 2015.

- **Community Engagement:** On September 28-29 and October 26-28, 2015, the Co-Chairs of the ACPC convened a series of meetings with members of the campus community to gather ideas and recommendations for the forthcoming integrated academic and co-curricular plan. K&A attended and took notes on the discussions, which included the following:
  
  - **Open forums** on advising, college-wide learning outcomes (CWLOs), the first year experience, enrollment management, living-learning communities, allocation of faculty positions, and graduate education. All faculty and staff were invited; participation ranged from 5-10 to as many as 25-30. Many participants attended multiple sessions.

  - **Topical discussions,** with relevant faculty and staff invited, on the following subjects: residential life, the Honors Program and Center for Creative Inquiry, internships, academic support services, multicultural experiences, and the Campus Wellness Plan. All faculty and staff were also invited; average participation was 5-10.
- Meetings with student groups, including KSC Pride, resident assistants, sophomore students, Common Ground, Equinox staff, the Student Assembly, Global Culture Club, and Interfaith Club.

- Leadership meetings with academic deans, Department Chairs from the three schools and the library, the Student Affairs Council, available Program Directors, and members of the ACPC.

In addition, the co-chairs of the ACPC held a number of consultative meetings with individuals and groups whose work intersects with topics being considered as part of the integrated plan, and the ACPC met on a weekly basis to discuss topics that emerged during these conversations and to review emerging planning themes.

- Planning Themes: K&A developed a draft summary of planning themes that emerged from campus meetings; revised the draft in response to questions, comments, and deliberations by the ACPC; and submitted a final draft summary to the ACPC on November 23, 2015. In addition, K&A prepared successive drafts of a list of suggested activities derived from the planning theme summary, also finalized and submitted to the ACPC on November 23, 2015.

- Community Feedback: On December 3, the ACPC Co-Chairs e-mailed an update on the planning process to the campus community, attaching a copy of the list of suggested activities and a link to the planning themes document online; they requested feedback and additional suggestions for proposed activities, via either an online form, e-mail responses, or in-person meetings. K&A compiled a summary of the feedback that was provided, revised the summary of planning themes and list of suggested activities, and submitted these documents to the ACPC on December 10, 2015.

- Planning Retreat: On December 17, 2015, the ACPC and College leadership convened in a retreat to consider the planning themes, suggested activities, community feedback, inventory of existing programs, and comparative research, and to reach consensus about the most important elements of the plan, timelines for implementation, and important implementation steps.

- Draft Integrated Academic and Co-Curricular Plan: K&A prepared this report and the attached implementation plan to summarize the results of the ACPC’s deliberations.
ACPC Membership

In addition to its two Co-Chairs, the ACPC was composed as follows:

- Four elected faculty representatives, one from each of the College's three schools and one from the library;
- Two representatives from the faculty unions, one each from the KSC Education Association and KSC Adjunct Association;
- One faculty representative from the College Senate;
- Two members of the faculty appointed by the Provost and VPSA;
- Two members of the staff, one each elected by the Operating Staff Council and Professional, Administrative, and Technical Staff Council;
- Four staff from the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management; and
- Two students, recruited and appointed by the ACPC Co-Chairs.

Membership of the ACPC:

- Melanie Adams, Professional and Graduate Studies
- Lara Bryant, Social Sciences
- Jennifer Ditkoff, Library
- Becky Dunn, Health Sciences
- Jennifer Ferrell, Student Involvement
- Heather Gilligan, Music
- Pat Halloran, Academic and Career Advising
- Ockle Johnson, Co-Chair
- Casey Justice, Residential Life
- Carolyn Keller, KSCEA
- Mark Long, Arts and Humanities
- Caroll Lothrop, Student Conduct
- John Lund, KSCAA
- Chris Miles, Recreational Sports
- Aaron Rock, Academic and Career Advising
- Paul Striffolino, Co-Chair
- Debra White-Stanley, Media Arts Center
- Emily Wolert, Student
- Natasha Young, Student