

# Teaching Matters

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## Faculty invited to determine new general education goals

“Liberal education has been this nation’s signature educational philosophy since the founding,” states Carol Geary Schneider, AAC&U president, in her recent article in *Peer Review*. “It has altered dramatically both in its subject matter and in its practices over the centuries, but through all the changes, it has held pride of place in the academy in part because of its inspiring aims ... and in part because of its capacity to adapt to a changing world.”

David Tritelli (2004) identifies these “inspiring aims” as these:

- Developing intellectual and ethical judgment;
- Expanding cultural, societal, and scientific horizons;
- Cultivating democratic and global knowledge and engagement; and
- Preparation for work in a dynamic and rapidly evolving economy.

This year, as many faculty members know, KU is in the process of re-evaluating the goals of its general education program, so that our goals might better reflect our “changing world.” Since 1989, the six goals of our program have been as follows:

1. Enhance the skills and knowledge needed to research, organize, evaluate, and apply new information and develop

a spirit of critical inquiry and intellectual integrity.

2. Acquire knowledge in the fine arts, the humanities, and the social, natural, and mathematical sciences and be able to integrate that knowledge across disciplines.
3. Improve the core skills of reading, writing, and numeracy, and enhance communication by clear, effective use of language.
4. Understand and appreciate the development, culture, and diversity of the U.S. and of other societies and nations.
5. Become aware of contemporary issues in society, technology, and the natural world and appreciate their complexity of cause and consequences.
6. Practice an ethic of self-discipline, social responsibility, and citizenship on a local, national, and international level.

The changes made to the general education goals will have far-reaching implications for many faculty members. You are invited to take part in this conversation.

—JE

### References

- Schneider, C. G. (Spring 2004). Changing practices in liberal education: What future faculty need to know. *Peer Review*, 4–7.
- Tritelli, D. (Spring 2004). Introduction. *Peer Review*, 3.

## General education across the curriculum

Dan Bernstein, CTE

All parties to the discussion about general education at KU express a desire for efficiency in whatever process emerges from this year's efforts. Any proposal will need to recognize the limits on resources perceived by all parties.

Students often see general education as a list of courses and categories, with a certain distribution of courses required. If a common course or experience is adopted this year, students would prefer that it replace something in the existing list, not be added to it.

We faculty members are jealous of both our time and the intellectual richness of our major programs. If capstone or other integrative courses are proposed for general education, we would not want them to come at the cost of extra teaching assignments or by reducing specialty courses that allow depth within a major.

Administrators have been clear that any reformation of the KU general education program will be accomplished within existing resources, through replacement and efficiency, not through additional funding or personnel.

Perhaps we can be efficient by expanding the metaphor of "writing across the curriculum" to include general education across many courses. Currently, general education goals are often identified with individual courses. One learns communication in this course, logical thinking in that course, interdisciplinary integration in a third course, cultural awareness in a diversity course, and engaged citizenship by volun-

teering 20 hours one semester. Boxes are checked, requirements are met, and it is done piece by piece. If many existing courses included intensive communication of varying kinds, then the skills could be acquired without a separate requirement. If existing courses explicitly included intercultural comparisons and analysis, there would be no need to add another requirement. When many courses use community engagement to promote learning of the course subject matter, there would be no need to add a service requirement for graduation.

If we could identify where and how students demonstrate within existing courses the capacities we value, it would be possible to find out how well we and our students are doing. Imagine a small archive

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of representative and anonymous graded samples of student work, gathered in the normal course of teaching classes. This sample of students' intellectual life could be the focus of a collective examination of general education. The process could be parallel to the current system of sampling students in senior interviews.

Such a plan presumes that we as a community have a stake in

the quality of the intellectual work done in our collective classes. Serious issues of credibility make it impossible simply to report course grades as sufficient evidence of intellectual achievement, so we need to make that learning visible to the community for consideration and discussion as evidence of the success of our students and our courses. Proper handling of samples and reviews would keep the focus on our collective achievement, not on individual courses or students.

Implementing such a strategy poses questions about costs and benefits. One immediate advantage is a potential reduction in the number of courses needed to achieve general education goals. That would free students and teachers to devote time to specialized and elective portions of degree programs. Another advantage for evaluation of general education is that both student work and the reading/grading are already being done; there is no additional cost in time or resources. The natural products of our teaching and learning are visible as the evidence of success.

Changes in existing courses might require some reallocation of time and effort, but within a constant total. For example, when cultural considerations or additional opportunities for communication are included in a course, some changes must be made. Time spent by instructors and teaching assistants may be moved around from one aspect of teach-

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## Service-Learning Institute headlines spring programs

Next spring, CTE will continue to offer several programs that can support faculty in a variety of ways. Note that applications for the Service-Learning Institute, Faculty Seminar, Faculty Fellows Program, and Teaching Grants Program are due November 1. Applications and program descriptions are available online at [www.ku.edu/~cte](http://www.ku.edu/~cte).

A new program, the **Service-Learning Institute 2005**, offers faculty members an opportunity to engage in discussions and activities to help you implement a service-learning component to one of your courses. During a two-day seminar in mid-January, you'll work with other faculty members who have successfully implemented service-learning and with CCO representatives who can assist you with appropriate placements for students.

Specific topics will include:

- How do I identify an appropriate community placement that

will meet the goals and support the content of my course?

- How can engagement in community enhance students' understanding of a course?
- How does course content inform students' activities in the community?
- Where in my course will students demonstrate their enhanced understanding?

Each participant will receive a \$750 instructional fund that can be used for materials, travel, or hourly help for any teaching project he or she chooses.

The **Faculty Seminar Program** supports faculty who are interested in exploring the intellectual work they do in teaching. Participants read and discuss reflections on learning in four seminar meetings; each receives a \$1,000 instructional fund.

The **Faculty Fellows Program** supports teachers who are developing innovations in their teaching and students' learning.

Fellows identify a learning goal for students and explore ways to enhance their teaching to reach that goal. Each Fellow receives a \$1,500 instructional fund.

**Teaching Grants** provide funds for faculty members who want to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and impact their students' learning. Award amounts vary; maximum is \$750 for an individual request or \$1,000 for work that involves more than one faculty member.

Chairs have received information about the **2005 Department Excellence in Teaching Award**; nominating statements are due November 10. This award is designed to recognize and honor academic departments (or equivalent academic units) on the Lawrence campus that are doing exemplary work to improve teaching and learning at KU.

For more information, check CTE's web site or contact us at 785-864-4199 or [cte@ku.edu](mailto:cte@ku.edu).

## General education across the curriculum

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ing to another. If more time is spent guiding student performance, less time might be spent on presentations. Technology can be used to replace teacher time on a few routine tasks, so that same time is available for reacting to integrative projects or innovative student communication.

We also should note that national and local data indicate

there is untapped student time outside of class; not every addition to a course needs to come from the time of the instructor, and revising a general education plan should also include revising student expectations about the time devoted to each course.

We need to remember that we are focused on intellectual goals, not on courses per se. If we can

locate the critical intellectual activities inside existing courses and if we can capture that work for community consideration of our success, students and faculty alike will have fewer general courses to take and to teach. That will allow all of us more space and time to engage in the portions of our work that result in deep and professional understanding.

## Developing students' vision of general education: A continuing conversation

Reva Friedman-Nimz, Teaching & Leadership

A strong general education foundation reflects our desire as faculty to provide a college education whose learning lasts. However, it is discouraging when students either don't understand our goal, or that they don't share it.

In two breakout sessions at the KU Summit last August, we used the following vignettes to dive deeply into the students' perspective. Participants also began to explore possible ways to reduce students' reluctance to "buy in" to the concept of a powerful, core, general education. The vignettes are included here so that other faculty might adapt them for use in their classes.

### Vignette A—To read AND to write?

Student A: Hey!—Wassup?

Student B: Not much, you?

Student A: Just bought my books for Western Civ. I'm broke!  
And I really don't want to take this course. The reading is, like, totally too much.

Student B: I'll say. I took it last semester. Wait till you see the writing assignments. No more fun for you, bud.

Student A: I don't know why they want us to take courses like this. I mean, I'm going to be a math major. Why should I have to know all this stuff about a bunch of guys I never heard of?

### Vignette B—Education in the abstract or the concrete?

Teacher: Thanks for stopping in. Have a seat. What can I do for you?

Student C: It's about this course.

Teacher: Is there a problem?

Student C: Well, sort of.

Teacher: Could you be more specific? Your grades are pretty good, so I can't imagine what the problem is.

Student C: I'm having a hard time making sense out of the lectures—there's way too much about issues and ideas—so much that history doesn't seem real to me anymore. What happened to the people? I mean, I used to watch the History Channel all the time before I took this course. I thought the course would be more like that, more exciting, more real, more alive. This is TORTURE.

### Vignette C—The "so what?" factor

Parent: Hi! How's school?

Student D: Mostly pretty good. The roommate thing is working out ok, and I haven't gotten lost too much. I've joined a few clubs, and I've even met some people who didn't go to my high school.

Parent: How about the school work?

Student D: Actually, that's the only bad part so far. I can keep up with the work, no problem, but WHEN am I ever going to use this stuff? No wonder they call KU the ivory tower!

Session participants agreed that a defensive or dismissive faculty reaction to the above statements would likely result in disengagement, eye rolling, and communication shutdown. So how might we use these complaints as opportunities? One faculty member suggested that we make our learning goals more visible by creating concept maps of the important ideas and themes that permeate core general education courses. Another mentioned that the faculty member in Vignette B could ask the student to describe "torture" and then focus on any class experience that was a little less torturous. In this way, it would be possible to acknowledge and demonstrate respect for the student voice in the conversation without judging the message. This approach could result in a few low investment, high potential yield changes such as some interest-based writing assignments or use of concept maps as assignments so that students start thinking about links across fields.

My personal experience with this issue is a little different from that of my colleagues in CLAS. As a professor in a professional school (education), the concerns my students voice tend to center

## Analysis and reflection are keys to course value

Ben Eggleston, Philosophy

In her essay “Developing students’ vision of general education,” Professor Friedman-Nimz is right: we should help our students learn not only our courses’ subject matter, but also their value. It’s not enough to say to students, “Well, this is a KU graduation requirement, so if you want to graduate, buckle down and do the work.” We should help students appreciate courses for their own sake, not just as ways of jumping through some curricular hoops.

But how can we do this? Probably no answer will suffice for everyone, but for me, the most promising answer to this question is suggested by the first of KU’s six general education goals: “Enhance the skills and knowledge needed to research, organ-

ize, evaluate, and apply new information and develop a spirit of critical inquiry and intellectual integrity.” I take it as no accident that, even before they mention knowledge, our goals mention skills. For in my view, an emphasis on skills underwrites both the best justification for general education requirements and the defense of them that resonates most persuasively with students.

Almost any course worthy of fulfilling a general education requirement will provide students with skills—ways of reading, thinking, analyzing, reflecting, and writing, for example—that will advantage them not only in other courses but also outside of college. A science course may enable students to understand the

role of empirical evidence in the testing of theories, a history course may train students to reflect critically on the motives and reliability of sources, and a literature course may equip students to develop arguments defending particular interpretations of texts. Naturally, in any such course, knowledge may be conveyed, but I suspect the skills may ultimately be more important. In this view, the chief benefits of general education courses are not isolated bits of knowledge that just “round out” a student’s education; rather, they are sets of skills that students will find pervading, informing, and strengthening their endeavors both in college and beyond.

## Developing students’ vision of general education

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on a phenomenon I have named “the magic pill.” That is, they want to have infused into their emerging practice the exact knowledge and skills that will soothe their performance anxiety about teaching. I attempt to address their concerns by raising the issue before they do and by making it a legitimate topic to discuss. I try to normalize their experience—I tell them to expect these concerns and that most new teachers share their feelings. I also ask for written feedback regularly. “What are you learning?” and “What are your questions or con-

cerns?” are two questions I might pose at the close of a class. If students want a private response, I ask them to write their names on the feedback; otherwise, they should remain anonymous. I summarize the comments and provide general comments to the class.

As a teacher educator focusing on education for students with high intellectual potential (gifted education), I think that a broad knowledge base is critical for creative thinking. And I believe that teachers, especially individuals working with bright students, need to understand phenomena

from the conceptual vantage point of a variety of disciplines. Understanding how epistemology differs across fields is crucial to promoting advanced work. Clearly, the purposes and roles of general education are important issues. Session participants agreed that talking with students about the goals for general education courses could at least open an authentic conversation about the meaning of a college education, particularly the ways in which it differs from other post secondary education. We hope CTE will continue the dialogue the rest of this year.

## Communicating with students outside of class

Susan Zvacek, IDS

When you teach a course face-to-face, it's easy to assume that electronic communication tools—especially discussion boards or chats—aren't really needed. After all, if students want to talk about course content, they can do that during class, right? Well ... maybe. It turns out that some students who never would speak up in class will readily participate in an online discussion, and the ensuing conversations are often richer and more focused than the in-class kind.

How does one get started with out-of-class communication? First, consider what it is you'd like to accomplish. Is your goal, for example, to encourage students to reflect on course readings, frame an argument using ideas gained from lectures, or compare disparate viewpoints? Consider using an asynchronous (not real time) discussion forum online, and students will have time to think about what they want to contribute, write out their message, proofread it, and then share it with others. You might also have students go beyond simply responding to your prompt and have them come up with discussion questions—as a group or individually. Or, assign roles such as “summarizer” or “prompter” (one who provides follow-up questions) to different students each week.

What if, instead, you're interested in how well students think on their feet and how quickly they can come up with appropriate responses or plans of action?

Consider using a “chat” environment and a semi-structured conversation protocol. For example, when I want students to respond to questions in real-time, I have them (in groups of eight to ten) log in to the chat room during pre-arranged times. I then pose questions and “call on” two or three students to respond. This alleviates the chaos that sometimes occurs with a sudden flurry of postings—or worse, the “silence” from a total absence of posts as everyone waits for someone else to respond. Once the initial posts are up and I've clarified or followed up, others can also chime in and participate. The advantage of an online chat over in-class discussion is that students may feel less intimidated about contributing their ideas when they aren't quite so visible to others, and their words can represent them—not their physical appearance, or unusual accent.

Whether you're using asynchronous discussions or chat rooms, you can vary the types of questions you ask. Different kinds of questions have different purposes. Meyers and Jones (1993) have identified these:

- Discussion starters
- Probing and challenging questions
- Connecting questions
- Predictive and hypothetical questions
- Analytical and evaluative questions
- Summary questions

Another possible application for real-time communications is

instant messaging. There are many easy-to-use programs, free for the downloading, that enable students to send you messages when, for example, they're preparing for a test or completing a major project. Check these web sites for programs:

<http://messenger.yahoo.com>

<http://www.icq.com/>

<http://messenger.msn.com>

In order to avoid a deluge of messages, create a special account for instructional use and activate it only when you're actually available for conversation and won't mind occasional interruptions.

Expanding the communication options for your students to reach you and one another with ease may enhance your face-to-face class time, and certainly will increase your “approachability” ratings. For more ideas on using online communication tools, contact IDS at 864-2600 or [ids@ku.edu](mailto:ids@ku.edu).

### Resource

Meyers, C. and Jones, T. (1993). *Promoting Active Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



## Digital posters on writing premiere November 1

This year the Center for Teaching Excellence, the KU Writing Center, and Writing Matters @KU will sponsor a workshop series in November for instructors who want to revamp a course to make it writing intensive. In addition, we will provide ongoing support and consultation as you take your writing intensive course to students in the spring semester. All sessions will be held at CTE in 135 Budig Hall.

### **Mondays in November**

#### Digital Poster Reception

November 1: 3:30–4:30 p.m.

Join us as we celebrate the development of digital posters, which will be part of CTE's elec-

tronic gallery of teaching. The posters in the spotlight on November 1 will illustrate effective uses of writing in various courses. Come view this new way of "making knowledge visible" and talk with the instructors who have been involved in this project.

#### CTE Seminar Series: Developing a Writing Intensive Course

November 8, 15, 22: 3:30–5 p.m.

Plan to attend all three sessions. Writing specialists and experienced instructors will lead you through the process of developing a writing intensive course. The goal is to assist you in revising an existing course you plan to teach in Spring 2005. We will guide you

in creating effective and meaningful assignments and demonstrate ways to manage, respond to, and evaluate student writing.

### **Spring 2005**

#### Seminar Follow-up (TBA)

We will help you assess the process and products generated in your writing intensive course. What worked well for you and for student writers? What will you do next time? What additional benefits were discovered and captured?

Spaces are limited; contact Judy Eddy at CTE (jeddy@ku.edu or 864-4100) to reserve your place.

## Faculty participate in CTE's summer and fall programs

For the fall 2005 semester, CTE's advisory board has named the following faculty as participants in these programs:

**Faculty Seminar:** Tony Rosenthal, history, and Andi Witczak, design. These faculty members will join together to read and review accounts of university teaching and explore ways to represent the intellectual work they do in teaching. Each will receive a \$1,000 instructional fund.

**Faculty Fellows:** Eve Levin, history, and Holly Storkel, speech-language-hearing. These faculty have identified a learning goal for their students that they wish them to achieve, and they will explore ways of enhancing their teaching to reach that learning goal. Each will receive \$1,500 for support.

Levin's work will focus on the Department of History's revision of its graduate program, which has been named part of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, a multi-year project to examine and improve doctoral education nationally. Storkel will revise a master's level course in clinical treatments of phonological disorders so that it contains explicit teaching of the skills needed to find and evaluate relevant information for practicing clinicians.

**Teaching Grants:** Barbara Anthony-Twarog, physics and astronomy; Karen Cook, KU libraries, and George McCleary, geography; John Kennedy, political science; Garth Myers, geography; Catherine Weaver and Paul D'Anieri, political science; and

Yan Bing Zhang, communication studies. Award amounts varied.

**Best Practices:** Ten faculty participated in the 2004 Best Practices Institute: Heide Crawford, German; Michael Godard, HSES; James Grobe, psychology; Bruce Hayes, French and Italian; Donita Massengill, teaching and leadership; Tracey McMillan, urban planning; Maria Roman Navarro, history of art; Linda Olafsen, physics and astronomy; Mark Thompson, HSES; and Andi Witczak, design. Each received a \$750 instructional fund. The Best Practices Institute was co-facilitated by Dan Bernstein, CTE; Ben Eggleston, philosophy; Megan Greene, history; Jeff Olafsen, physics and astronomy; and Holly Storkel, speech-language-hearing.

## General education at KU: A brief history

Paul Atchley, Psychology, and Ann Volin, CTE

The six primary goals that KU has now (see page 1) developed from the 1989 “Goals of General Education at KU.” A look at KU’s historical ideals on general education provides insights into how our institutional goals evolved over the years:

1866: The original 1866 KU catalogue (*A General Description of the University*) provided one goal:

“The object of the University shall be to provide the inhabitants of this State with the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of Literature, Science, and the Arts.”

1879: The universal education theme continued in 1879. For example, students in a course on Mental and Moral Science were “prepared by previous study for more critical research,” followed by a “critical review of the whole subject,” combined with recitation with the President, who was responsible for instruction.

1922: By this time, the “Functions of the University” became threefold, as described in the 29th Biennial Report: the education and intensive training of students, the discovery of new truth through investigation in the arts and sciences, and the dissemination of knowledge among the people.

1924: The “betterment” model appears in the 1924 College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Statement of Purpose: “The combination of applied science with basic science and with cultural and citizenship subjects is therefore intended not only to prepare young men and women to succeed in some definite technical work, but also to lead a successful and well-rounded life.”

1976: Students reading the KU catalogue for the “Aims” of an education in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences would find this:

“The purpose of the baccalaureate degrees in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is liberal education, which is different from both vocational training and isolated specialization. A rigorous education includes both the understanding of our past and a concern for the future through discovery of new knowledge. Breadth of knowledge is necessary, but risks superficiality; depth is equally important, but risks over-specialization. A liberal education presupposes intensive study of the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.

In addition, a liberal education embodies both theory and practice, the knowledge and experience of both being requisite to an understanding of the sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences. Thus such an education is active and relevant in the most fundamental sense.”

Throughout this academic year, it is important that we reflect upon how we can continue to improve using goals to further the university experience for our students.

Reference: Atchley, P. (2004). Content with context: Goals in higher education. *Reflections from the classroom*, KU Center for Teaching Excellence, 1–4.

*Teaching Matters* is published by the Center for Teaching Excellence and distributed to KU faculty at no charge. Its purpose is to disseminate information to faculty about teaching, learning, and faculty enrichment opportunities.

The staff welcomes your comments and suggestions. We will upon occasion invite the submission of articles of special interest to the academic community.

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