

# K PLAN FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: REVITALIZING A FELLOWSHIP IN LEARNING

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Distinctiveness Initiative Task Force (DITF)<sup>1</sup> distributed their original set of recommendations to the faculty of Kalamazoo College in September 2007.<sup>2</sup> The fall quarter of 2007 was used as a listening period in which DITF and EPC members facilitated faculty discussions and met with individual departments. During December 2007 and January 2008, the DITF reviewed and summarized faculty feedback before using this information to revisit and revise the original recommendations.

The proposals described in the present document are somewhat different from the original recommendations, and this is a direct result of the faculty feedback compiled in fall 2007. Our present recommendations represent a renewed commitment to the central role of rigorous academics, experiential learning, and study abroad to a distinctive K education. Many of our proposed changes are designed to provide faculty with the freedom and the resources to use their classrooms as laboratories for innovation in teaching and learning. Other proposed changes should provide students with a curriculum that allows them the freedom to design a unique K education that is meaningful and integrated. By capitalizing on the best thinking of all faculty members and the spirit of innovation demonstrated throughout Kalamazoo College's history, we can collectively create the K Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The main components of the revised DITF proposal are:

- An academically rigorous major in a discipline
- Coursework in a second language through the intermediate level
- Three signature experiences [First-Year Experience, similar to what we currently have but including a "Bridge" experience before the beginning of the first year for a greater number of students, Study Abroad (with expansion of domestic off-campus programs), and SIP]
- Three Core Seminars (First-year, Sophomore/Junior, and Senior seminars), connecting with the signature experiences and providing a thread of continuity and points of integration through the four years at K
- Opportunities for students to develop an Integrated Interdisciplinary Minor (similar to our current concentrations), fostering breadth of engagement with academic disciplines
- Opportunities for students to develop a Global Studies minor by combining language proficiency, core seminars, and study abroad experience
- Exploration of the possibility of a Center for Integrated Experiential Learning that expands our currently distinctive programs and becomes a greater force for integration
- A more flexible way of crediting student activities (lab-courses, service-learning courses, PE, music, independent study, externship/internship, other experiential learning opportunities)

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A lists all members who have served on this task force.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the original curricular recommendations, the earlier document includes the reasons to conduct a curricular review at this time, a discussion about that which is distinctive about a Kalamazoo education, a renewed vision of the College, and the desired outcomes of a Kalamazoo education, which are not repeated here.

## The Curriculum Review Process

DITF began the curricular review process in May 2007 by developing guiding principles for a new curriculum and the task force's original set of recommendations. These recommendations were distributed to the K College faculty in September 2007, and a listening phase ensued in which DITF, in conjunction with members of the EPC, hosted three open discussions on proposal components and various department conversations. The compiled results of these conversations are available at the following URL [[moodle.kzoo.edu/login/index.php](http://moodle.kzoo.edu/login/index.php)]. To digest these reports, subgroups of DITF and EPC met to identify common themes, the elements of the original proposal that had broad faculty support, and those elements that did not. The DITF conducted two subsequent retreats to synthesize and incorporate the larger themes from the feedback into our revised recommendations.

There was a tremendous range of opinion throughout all of the comments, so the DITF focused primarily on prevailing trends in the feedback. Some general themes arose across all the conversations, particularly concerning innovation and workload.

\* Innovation: The number of innovative ideas that arose during these conversations particularly struck the task force. Clearly, many faculty colleagues used the original DITF recommendations as a springboard to think creatively about ways to re-imagine teaching and learning at K College. This spirit of innovation was often infectious, with new possibilities emerging as faculty shared their ideas. To capitalize on this spirit of intellectual collegiality, it seemed appropriate to loosen the prescriptive nature of the task force's original recommendations to allow for more innovation in individual classrooms.

\* Concerns about Workload: There was also a prevailing sentiment that the new academic program should not be added on to existing requirements or be incorporated into existing faculty workload. Generally speaking, these concerns were related to having sufficient resources for faculty development to ensure that the ideas the faculty implements will be successful, and also to implement the ideas in a manageable time frame so as not to overburden the faculty.

Regarding specific components of the original DITF proposal, the following feedback substantially shaped subsequent discussions and present recommendations.

\* Core Seminars: Overall, there was general support for the core seminar concept, particularly as it related to the larger theme of integration. Nonetheless, there was concern about the College's ability to offer four core seminars, the availability of sufficient resources for faculty development to teach these seminars, and the content of these seminars.

\* Integrated Interdisciplinary Minor (IIM): There was general interest in the integrated interdisciplinary minor, but not as a substitute for breadth, or a replacement for double majors or disciplinary minors. There were also a number of implementation questions of whether the IIM would be restricted to current concentrations, specific faculty-designed templates, student-designed IIMs, or some combination of these possibilities.

\* Global Studies Certificate/Minor: Faculty members generated many innovative ideas throughout the fall discussions, and some quickly developed a groundswell of support. One such proposal was to create a Global Studies certificate or minor for students who completed the foreign language courses, the respective core seminar classes, and participated in Study Abroad.

\* Breadth: Although no conversations were organized specifically around the question of breadth or distributional requirements, support for such requirements was raised in each conversation. Due to this interest, and the decision that the IIM should not be the pedagogical vehicle for breadth, the task force revisited its thinking about distributional requirements.

\* Calendar: As noted during conversations in Fall 2007, the 4-12 calendar proposed in the original DITF document was eliminated from consideration because of concerns about feasibility and the impact on various majors. However, widespread support for calendar change of some sort was clearly detected in the faculty feedback, and therefore the task force strongly recommends further exploration of this issue.

## THE PROPOSAL

*Reflecting the mission of Kalamazoo College, the K Plan for the 21st Century will provide students with a truly integrated educational experience that builds on the College's strengths in study abroad; international, intercultural, and experiential education; and graduate and professional preparation. The Plan is based on a spirit of curricular innovation shared by the entire College community and a commitment to maintaining the historically distinctive profile of the College. New features will allow students to more intentionally connect the individual components of the K Plan, multiplying the effects of our ability to offer a cohesive, transformative liberal arts education.*

The revised DITF K Plan for the 21st Century proposes a rich liberal arts curriculum that develops key skills; encourages disciplinary and interdisciplinary exploration; promotes deep understanding of at least one field of study; and integrates classroom experiences, a variety of experiential learning opportunities, and co-curricular activities into a coherent whole. Key features of this curriculum include a strengthened global and intercultural focus, continued widespread participation in meaningful study abroad experiences, capstone experiences including Senior Individualized Projects for all students, and a dedication to integration of the entire K experience. This rich and multifaceted curriculum is balanced by a simplified set of graduation requirements to encourage student agency and intentionality in their curricular exploration and integration. Parts of the curriculum are well defined, but many aspects are still open to innovation and experimentation by the faculty. Details of the proposed curriculum are provided below.

To attain the goals of the curriculum, and to help us celebrate our distinctiveness on campus and communicate it to others, the task force recommends expanding our current Center for Experiential Education and renaming it the Center for Integrated Experiential Education. An expanded Center would continue to coordinate Study Abroad, Career Development, Service-Learning, and the new Guilds, while encouraging integrative planning, reflection, research, and dissemination by the faculty and administration. In promoting our goal of providing students with an integrated experiential education that includes a strong global and intercultural focus, the Center would help the institution make the whole of a K education greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the primary components of the original DITF proposal was a "4-12" calendar. Faculty discussion of this calendar proposal was illuminating, clarifying a number of pedagogical, developmental, and curricular issues. The task force recommends that the issue of the K calendar be reconsidered once the curriculum is more settled, taking the following factors into account:

- the difficulties that our current start and stop dates impose on students, particularly athletes and students who wish to engage in internships and research experiences,
- the need to continue to allow as broad a range of students as possible to study abroad, including participation in long-term programs,
- the developmental difficulties inherent in compressing students' exploration and decision-making time even further,
- the need for planned (or unplanned) breaks built into every term, and
- the impact of the calendar on distinctiveness.

To allow for more flexibility in course design and course structure, the task force repeats its earlier recommendation to shift from units to a credit system. The details of such a change, however, will need more careful study and input from the Registrar, the Provost, and various faculty committees.

## **Proposed Curriculum**

The proposed curriculum is designed to allow students to obtain a foundation in the liberal arts, including developing key skills; to explore different ways of thinking; to pursue their interest in at least one field in depth; and to make connections within and across many disciplines. The proposed curriculum is also designed to be rich in educational opportunities, including Bridges (a variety of pre-orientation educational experiences inspired by the Land/Sea program), breadth across the liberal arts, service-learning, career development, strong majors, study abroad, the Senior Individualized Project, and three Core Seminars, each of which will serve as both preparation and integration of the components of the K Plan. The series of Core Seminars and the four key goals of a K education (developing critical skills, exploring the liberal arts, pursuing depth in a major, and integrating these experiences into a coherent whole) are described more fully below.

### **Seminar Series:**

The three Core Seminars are First-Year Seminars, Sophomore Seminars, and Senior Seminars. First-Year Seminars will prepare students for further work at the College by focusing on writing and communication, introducing global or intercultural ideas, and encouraging students to reflect on and integrate their high school experiences and transition to college. Sophomore Seminars will delve more deeply into cultural issues and intercultural understanding, preparing students for study abroad and living in a global world. Senior Seminars will focus on integrating students' K experiences and preparing them for future lives beyond K, through interdisciplinary seminars integrating all aspects of a K education or, at least for a transitional period, through disciplinary seminars integrating what they have learned in their major. The Sophomore and Senior Seminars should satisfy a handful of key learning outcomes, but be primarily innovation-driven; that is, faculty creativity and experimentation are encouraged. For example, a Sophomore/Junior Seminar split before and after study abroad has been proposed, which could be a valuable option for some students. Faculty and students are also encouraged to propose Liberal Arts Colloquium (LAC) events thematically linked to seminars (and seminars could require attendance at key LAC events).

Required to graduate: Successful completion of all three seminars. An appropriate substitute for the sophomore seminar during a transitional period (or beyond, if necessary) would be two cultures courses.

### **Foundational Skills:**

Students should develop proficiency in a variety of skills, such as writing, communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, structured reflection, and a second language. Development of these skills will begin in the First-Year Seminar. On-campus general education courses and the Core Seminars should intentionally introduce or further develop any appropriate skills, including structured reflection, which enhances learning and promotes integration. Majors should further develop all of the key skills, or require appropriate cognates.

Required to graduate: Successful completion of the First-Year Seminar (see above) and demonstrated language proficiency through the intermediate level. The general education courses and major, which are also required to graduate, will further develop the basic skills. *The specific list of required basic skills should be determined by the Educational Policies Committee and the faculty.*

### **Exploration and Breadth:**

The curriculum encourages student exploration within the liberal arts, on our campus and on study abroad. Simple requirements will ensure basic breadth while giving students freedom to integrate courses of interest to them. The task force encourages faculty to identify or develop integrated, interdisciplinary course clusters and minors to help students and advisors balance the exploration of new areas with the interdisciplinary enrichment of their existing interests. In particular, the task force recommends the development of a Global Studies Minor (perhaps awarded to all students who complete

the foreign language requirement, the Core Seminar series including an interdisciplinary senior seminar on a global topic, and study abroad).

Required to graduate: Fulfillment of simple distribution requirements. One possible model would be: 1 creative expression course (or set of activities), 1 physical education/wellness set of activities, and 2 courses from each of three areas of study: humanities (including fine arts history and literature taught in any language), mathematics and natural sciences, and social sciences. *Views of the faculty and within the task force vary widely on how much breadth should be required and how that should be done. The task force recommends that the final set of distribution requirements be developed by a committee focused on the question of breadth, with additional input from the faculty. It should be simple to understand, preserve the possibility of double majors, and not exceed seven courses beyond the language and seminar requirements.*

### **Depth in a Field of Study:**

Strong majors will continue to be at the center of our curriculum. Students must pursue depth by majoring in a discipline; students may also follow their interests by completing a second disciplinary major or a minor, or by integrating courses from several disciplines. Individual majors may continue to require comprehensive exams, but this will no longer be a universal college requirement.

Required to graduate: Successful completion of a major.

### **Connections and Integration:**

Many of the suggested curricular changes are designed to enhance integration and help students make connections across on-campus courses and activities, as well as between on- and off-campus experiences. In particular, the Bridges, three Core Seminars, SIP, and integrated, interdisciplinary minors (including the Global Studies Minor) are integrative curricular components of this plan. Service-learning, career development experiences, and the Guilds are opportunities for integrating work in the classroom into the community, and the community into the classroom. LAC events that are thematically linked to seminars will provide further integration of coursework with broader intellectual conversations, current events, or cultural experiences. The physical education and wellness requirement represents a broader need to integrate the curriculum with the entire student experience, which should include encouraging students to actively engage in co-curricular activities. The Center for Integrated Experiential Education will be a vehicle for promoting and implementing integrated experiences across the entire K experience.

Required to graduate: Successful completion of three seminars (see above), the PE/Wellness credit (see above), and a SIP.

### **An Innovation-Driven Curriculum**

This curriculum provides a number of opportunities for curricular development, innovation, and experimentation. In particular, the development of the Bridges and Sophomore and Senior seminars will completely depend on faculty and staff innovation. The task force encourages creativity and experimentation in pedagogy and content, with appropriate sharing and assessment of results with faculty colleagues down the road. Identification of integrated, interdisciplinary course clusters and minors and the development of the Global Studies Minor are two other opportunities for creative thinking and collaboration.

## Summary of Requirements to Graduate

In identifying graduation requirements, the task force had two goals: 1) to ensure that all students develop key skills, explore breadth in the liberal arts and depth in one field, and have the opportunity to integrate their experiences, and 2) to keep the requirements simple to understand and follow, providing students freedom and flexibility in constructing their own educational path. The recommended requirements are:

- A minimum number of units/credits (the exact number to be determined following the “units to credits” discussion)
- Language proficiency through the intermediate level (103 or 201)
- Three seminars
  - First-year Seminar
  - Sophomore Seminar
  - Senior Seminar
- Breadth across the liberal arts; for example,
  - 2 Courses from each of 3 areas of study
  - 1 Creative Expression unit (a course or activities, e.g., music ensembles)
  - 1 Wellness unit (a number of activities)
- Completion of a major
- Senior Individualized Project

## Distinctive Features of the K Plan for the 21st Century

For close to 40 years, Kalamazoo College has been nationally recognized for its distinctive K Plan. The K Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century celebrates that distinctiveness and enhances it, through new curricular and experiential opportunities and a focus on integrating the many components of a K education into a coherent whole. Distinctive components of the plan, old and new, include:

- Bridges
- Core Seminars
- Service-Learning
- Strong Majors
- The Externship Program
- A Strong International and Intercultural Focus
- Study Abroad
- The Senior Individualized Project

The performance of our students, as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) project, or the number of students who go on to graduate and professional schools, also sets K apart. The K Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century aims to be a model of a significant, integrated, coherent educational experience that is more than the sum of its already distinctive parts.

## PATHWAY TO IMPLEMENTATION

The K Plan for the 21st Century seeks to build upon many of our institution's existing strengths, while creating specific areas of distinctiveness that will encourage the growth of new programs—academic and co-curricular—that will appeal to future generations of students. Important elements of the plan must be realized through strong faculty engagement every step of the way over the next five years. Further hands-on work in shaping the new direction envisioned in this plan will come through development of the content and ongoing assessment of the Core Seminars; an enhanced vision for a Center for Experiential Education; critical decisions about the most suitable calendar to deliver the desired educational outcomes; and creative thinking about ways to make Bridge experiences available to a wider range of students, among others.

### **Short-Term Implementation Goals**

Because the proposal seeks to build upon existing strengths, much of what it emphasizes is, in fact, already in place or may be put into place relatively soon. Strong majors, First-Year Seminars, distinctive Service-Learning opportunities, Study Abroad, and SIPs are already in place, and these will continue to be foundational for the College's future distinctiveness. The key to success for the K Plan for the 21st Century will be a better and more thorough integration of these critical elements into the overall student experience. Happily, a number of the elements crucial to achieving this integration are already beginning to emerge, while others can begin to emerge very soon.

The Experiential Education committee is already discussing ways in which the existing Center for Experiential Education might become a more effective force for integration. As noted earlier, the task force supports and encourages a full investigation of this potential by the appropriate faculty committees, administrators, and staff. One promising outcome of this work might be a renamed Center for Integrated Experiential Education, which would have the ability to focus and strengthen these efforts on campus while drawing attention to and highlighting this very distinctive aspect of a K College education. While the results of this investigation might not be available for some time, it has already begun and could easily and quickly be expanded.

Similarly, groups of faculty have already begun to develop models for the Sophomore Seminar. Colleagues in the Foreign Languages Division, for example, have drafted model course syllabi based upon the learning outcomes called for in the original DITF proposal. Some of these new seminars will be offered as early as next year. Plans are already in place to provide seed money for similar course development in other Divisions, in the hope that more models for these seminars will soon evolve. It is realistic to expect that, based on the promised course development support, a range of these seminars can be piloted beginning in the 2008-09 academic year.

Furthermore, such integrative proposals as the Global Studies Minor and the optional Integrated Interdisciplinary Minor could be introduced into the curriculum fairly easily, once their precise characteristics are shaped by the appropriate committees and approved by the faculty. As many of the constituent parts of these innovative programs may already be found within our existing curriculum, these elements could reasonably be implemented by the 2009-10 academic year.

New requirements for General Education based on the idea of simplification will need to be reviewed by the Educational Policies Committee, refined (if necessary), and brought before the faculty for approval in time to apply to students matriculating in the 2009-10 academic year. A key issue to resolve in this regard will be the question of breadth within our students' General Education. The precise nature of measures that will adequately define and ensure breadth have yet to be determined, and this represents a further element of the plan that will benefit from broad and active engagement on the part of our faculty.

## **Longer-Term Implementation Goals**

The implementation horizon for some other pieces of the plan will be slightly longer, based upon the need for further engagement with their content by relevant faculty committees. For example, the determination of the task force that a shift from using units to credits will be beneficial for students and for the institution represents only an important first step. This is a change that will require further study by several administrative offices and faculty committees, including the Registrar, the Provost, and EPC. It is possible that these changes could be made by the 2009-10 academic year, but the need for further study at this time is apparent.

While planning and discussion for most, if not all, elements of the plan must clearly begin now, certain changes will need to be implemented further along the planned trajectory. A desired change in our academic calendar certainly numbers among them. The task force strongly recommends a calendar change that will align our start and stop dates more closely with those of other institutions. We recognize, however, that this matter is complicated and will require further study and engagement by a wide range of faculty and staff before we are able to determine the most suitable change for the College. We therefore encourage further discussion of this important issue by a new committee. In a similar way, the question of how the LAC program will continue to be best integrated into the future curriculum has yet to be determined. With First-Year Seminars in the Fall and with the possibility that Sophomore and Senior Seminars would be offered primarily in the Winter and Spring, respectively, integrating LACs with the Core seminars might be possible and indeed desirable. The task force supports ongoing efforts to bring more notable speakers to campus and to promote more coherence within the LAC program and other on-campus events.

The task force also supports the creation of Bridges -- pre-orientation opportunities for First-Year students. We regret that feasibility and unresolved questions regarding the calendar have made it impossible to guarantee a Bridge experience for all incoming students. The task force hopes, however, that discussion and innovation on this issue will continue, with the goal of making such opportunities more broadly and perhaps even universally available.

## **Assessment**

A critical and ongoing element of this proposal will be assessment. While the process of developing new seminars in the Sophomore and Senior years has already begun, it will clearly be a gradual one. Responses to the original proposal made clear that, across campus, there is a wealth of innovative ideas about how such seminars might be constructed. Exploring these and other ideas will require both time and support. In the future the faculty will need to assess the relative merits of various seminar models, to decide which one(s) at each level best achieves the faculty's integrative and other goals, and possibly make those seminars required of every student, without the alternatives that are suggested in the current Curriculum proposal. The task force believes that this decision will need to be made with an awareness of staffing as well as pedagogical issues. We envision that this assessment work will be ongoing, and that an excellent opportunity for more comprehensive assessment will come in the form of the College's next Self Study, which must take place prior to its next accreditation review in 2013.

## **Financial Support**

In all planning for the College's future distinctiveness, one thing is clear: these bold steps cannot be accomplished without significant financial support for creativity and innovation on the part of faculty and staff toward the development of new programs. Funds will be made available for summer 2008 for course development toward the realization of Core Seminars. Furthermore, a proposal is now being written to the Mellon Foundation for a significant grant toward faculty development. Preliminary discussions with

the granting agency indicate that the results should be very promising, and will go a long way toward providing faculty with the much needed time and means to create innovative and creative aspects of the new curriculum. Beyond faculty development and curricular support, funding will be crucial to realizing many of the administrative changes called for in this plan. New support will be necessary to absorb costs associated with important shifts like those implied by calendar change, or by a shift from units to credits. Faculty endorsement of this new direction will give the Advancement Office the ability to raise funds for these changes, as well as for important initiatives, like the Bridges Program, that face challenges to their realization under current budgetary constraints. Throughout, there is a strong commitment on the part of the institution to providing the means necessary to support the faculty and staff in continuing to develop, implement, and properly assess the ideas contained in the new K Plan.

## APPENDIX A: DITF MEMBERSHIP

Espelencia Baptiste, Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Robert Batsell, Associate Professor of Psychology; Planning Facilitator  
Alyce Brady, Professor of Computer Science  
Joseph Brockington, Associate Provost for International Programs  
Thomas Evans, Associate Professor of Music  
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Jeanne Hess, Professor of Physical Education  
Patrik Hultberg, Associate Professor of Economics  
Amelia Katanski, Assistant Professor of English  
Richard Koenig, Associate Professor of Art  
James Langeland, Associate Professor of Biology  
James Lewis, Associate Professor of History  
Elizabeth Manwell, Assistant Professor of Classical Studies  
Rob Passage, Assistant Professor of Physical Education  
Jennifer Redmann, Associate Professor of German  
Kathleen W. Smith, Professor of Romance Languages  
Michael Sosulski, Associate Professor of German  
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