Application to AAC&U 2010 Institute on General Education - University of Missouri – Kansas City

Background and History of the University

The University of Missouri at Kansas City is a mid-sized, urban land grant university with approximately 15,000 students awarding degrees ranging from the bachelors degree through the doctoral degree, and also offers first professional degrees. The University of Missouri at Kansas City has an extraordinary range of academic units and programs, including the School of Dentistry; School of Nursing; School of Pharmacy; School of Medicine; School of Law; Conservatory of Music and Dance; School of Computing and Engineering; School of Biological Sciences; College of Arts and Sciences; School of Education; and the Henry W. Bloch School of Business and Public Administration. The mission for the university is to lead in life and health sciences; to deepen and expand strength in the visual and performing arts; to develop a professional workforce and collaborate in urban issues and education; and to create a vibrant learning and campus life experience. The vision for the university is to become a model urban research university characterized by signature graduate and professional programs, a dynamic undergraduate population, a highly diverse faculty, staff and student body, and active engagement with its city and region. The institution is comprised of academic units, many of which were originally stand alone higher education entities, that merged to form one institution of higher education which was integrated into the University of Missouri system as one of the four campuses of the University of Missouri. The University of Missouri at Kansas City was formed and merged into the University of Missouri system in 1963. Historically, the University of Missouri at Kansas City has focused more on its graduate and professional programs, than on its undergraduate programs. This background and history of the university influences our existing culture and practice today. In many instances, the individual Schools/College are more widely known than the university as a whole. This history has also contributed to institutional practices and decision making processes that are decentralized. Recent strategic planning has lead to decisions that will focus the university on growing the undergraduate student population, particularly the first time, full-time student population.

Student Demographics and Student Success Information

Approximately 60% (N=8,000) of our students are undergraduates. The Fall 2009 entering freshman class consisted of 1100 students, with approximately 900 of those undergraduate students entering as first-time, full-time college students and approximately 1000 of our undergraduate students coming to our university as transfer students. Our campus-based student minority population is approximately 30%. Our undergraduate student first time, full-time retention rate is 74% and our undergraduate first time, full-time six year graduation rate is 45%.
Need: What is your current general education model and what has motivated a desire for redesign? Have assessment results prompted the review or do you need help creating an assessment plan? What work already has been accomplished and by whom? What resource or political issues are at play in the process? Has a unified vision of the planned redesign emerged?

- **Current general education model.** Current requirements reflect a decentralized approach using a menu driven option for selection by students. The current requirements for general education have been established by each academic unit (College/School) and range between approximately 24 to 66 credit hours. The overall review of the current general education requirements found in each of the nine academic schools/college with undergraduate degree programs demonstrated there were only two common requirements across all academic units. Those common requirements include a writing course and a course focused on the United States and state constitution. The later course is mandated by state law.

- **Motivation for redesign.** The existing general education requirements are not clearly tied to our unique university mission and do not help our student persistence and degree completion rates. Our requirements do not necessarily reflect the current national learning objectives, as reflected in the LEAP Initiative. The institution, as a whole, has not systematically reviewed the undergraduate general education requirements, however, individual academic units (schools/college) have reviewed and revised general education requirements due primarily to discipline specific accreditation changes/requirements and/or faculty/student identified needs and concerns. The lack of a coherent general education program poses a potential barrier for students who are “undecided” or who decide to change their degree program during the course of their studies. Students in these two situations often have to take additional coursework to satisfy a “new” set of general education requirements for their “new” degree program. The current structure of our program is a problem when we are trying to develop articulation agreements with community college partners resulting in multiple agreements rather than one common agreement. The diversity of requirements compounds our challenges when assessing student learning and general education program outcomes.

- **Assessment results.** The current assessment of our general education program consists of using the MAPP (Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress/ETS Proficiency Profile). The systematic use of these data for curricular revision is not an institutionalized process. The timing of student assessment does not accurately reflect
knowledge acquisition and is problematic. However, the MAPP is a mandated graduation requirement. A new assessment plan will need to be developed in conjunction with any revision in our current general education requirements.

- **Work accomplished.** There has been no sustained effort for campus-wide revision of the general education requirements, although the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education have revised aspects of their respective requirements during the past 20 years. Most recently (within the last 5 years), the College of Arts and Sciences has discussed a revised general education curriculum reflecting an integrated experience for students with student learning objectives addressing broad learning areas rather than discipline focused courses. In Fall, 2009 the Provost appointed the General Education Advisory Task Force made up of members representing each academic unit (School/College). The charge for the task force was to develop a strategy/plan for the creation and implementation of a “new” UMKC general education program that is tied to our UMKC mission, puts student success and student retention as a focus, includes a premier student learning assessment component and has an ongoing review and revision cycle. This plan will be submitted to the Provost as a recommendation. The work of the committee will include:

  - Reviewing current national perspectives regarding general education experiences for undergraduate students in higher education, including: AAC&U’s position statements and publications, reviewing aspirational peer institutions’ general education and assessment programs and reviewing programs at institutions deemed to be exemplars of “best practices” associated with general education and student learning outcome assessment associated with general education programs.
  - Reviewing current work in the state of Missouri regarding entrance and exit competencies (CAI) and consider this work in the revision of the UMKC general education program.
  - Reviewing any additional relevant material to assist in the development of an outstanding general education program.
  - Developing and implementing a plan for engaging the university campus in discussions regarding the revision of UMKC’s general education program.
  - Maintaining student engagement and student retention concerns at the forefront of general education plans, including the development of a unique “UMKC” student experience in general education tied to the university mission.
  - Preparing a written proposal for submission to the AAC&U General Education Summer Institute focused on our UMKC campus revision efforts.

The task force has been meeting regularly (twice monthly) since mid October to review national trends, employer feedback, current general education model programs and programs at aspirational peer institutions. This review has focused on gaining knowledge about the
content of general education programs as well as a focus on the process of general education revision.

- **Political issues and resources.** This concern was identified in our recent strategic planning efforts and the Provost has made this initiative a major campus priority. The state of Missouri Department of Higher Education (in 2005) implemented an approach to facilitate student transfer of general education credit hours through the identification of general education goals and competencies including skills areas (communicating, higher-order thinking, managing information, valuing) and knowledge areas (social and behavioral sciences, humanities and fine arts, mathematics and life and physical sciences). Institutions of higher education throughout the state were invited to adopt this framework and to identify campus level coursework associated with every goal/competency area and associated assessment strategies. During a recent site visit by the Higher Learning Commission, it was noted that the general education program needed review and revision and should include a comprehensive assessment plan tied to student learning outcomes. A newly implemented responsibility centered management budgeting model has created numerous issues for the academic units and has consequences for academic program and curricular revisions. There are also common concerns related to potential changes that may impact existing requirements, academic discipline major requirements and the possibility of increasing general education program hours. The current fiscal climate in the state is challenging and does not look like it will improve in the near future. This situation will have a negative impact on the university budget outlook and will need to be considered as we move forward in our revision.

**Goals:**

- **Institute priorities.** Our institutional team will focus on creating a general education program plan focused on the process of program revision. Our team will be learning from the interactive presentations from the Institute faculty and from fellow colleagues participating in the institute.

- **High-priority tasks.** Our team will establish a general education revision process plan including developing a communications plan, a ratification plan, a proposed governance structure, a proposed course approval process, an implementation plan and an assessment framework.
Team characteristics:

- Provost, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (a member of the General Education Advisory Task Force), Associate Dean from the College Arts and Sciences (a member of the General Education Advisory Task Force), representative from the Faculty Senate Executive Committee – Chair of Academic Affairs sub-committee (faculty member in the College of Arts and Sciences), a member of the General Education Advisory Task Force from one of the professional schools and faculty member from the College of Arts and Sciences.