

An Evaluation of the Process of Assessing General Education at The University Of Kansas

Executive Summary - Process of General Assessment - January, 2001

Each year, KU undertakes an assessment of how well its goals for undergraduate general education are being met. The centerpiece of this assessment is an interview process between selected senior students and faculty. This year, the Office of the Provost has initiated a study of this assessment process and of the general education goals themselves. This report considers two questions that were posed to the Process Committee.

Are the Results of the Assessment Process Reliable and Accurate? There seems to be a strong sentiment that the interviews are interesting and enjoyable for faculty and students alike, but a considerable institutional commitment of time and money is invested in this process. Accordingly, any non-trivial use of the data must be supported by an acceptable level of scientific validity. Three main issues were identified:

- Small sample sizes.
- Questionable reliability of faculty assessments of student performance.
- Difficulty in determining the “KU Difference”.

Other concerns pertained to biases resulting from the interview process itself, insufficient correlation of interview results with other data collected, difficulty in analyzing apparent changes in student performance over time, and difficulty in comparing KU with other institutions. On balance, the committee stops short of recommending dramatic changes, although it is considered critical to increase the sample size, perhaps through a web- or classroom-based assessment that could supplement the interview process. Other suggestions are to revise the interview structure so that questions more directly address the goals, to increase the number of students interviewed, and provide more training to faculty participants.

How Should the Information Be Disseminated and Utilized? Preliminary information indicates that the information obtained from the general education assessment currently is neither disseminated nor used to a degree commensurate with the resources being invested in the process. The finding that many of our colleagues are not even aware of the goals for general education strongly suggests that the potential inherent in this process is in danger of being wasted. We suggest:

- A clear and public commitment to the goals of general education and the value of their assessment should be made and regularly affirmed by the Chancellor, Provost, Deans, and other leaders of the KU academic community.
- A university-wide long-range plan with respect to the assessment and implementation of general education should be formulated.
- A university-wide dialogue on the goals of general education, and how they fit into the university experience, should be held.
- Individual units should regularly consider their contributions to general education.
- Faculty participation should be encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded.
- The results of the general education assessment must be made much more readily available.
- The existence of these goals and, more importantly, the benefits of a well-rounded education should be emphasized to students at all levels, beginning with first-year student orientation.

Introduction

In 1989, the University established eleven goals for the general education of its undergraduate students. Each year, KU undertakes an assessment of how well these goals are being met. The centerpiece of this assessment is a weeklong interview process between selected fourth-year students and faculty. This year, the Provost has initiated a study of this assessment process, how it affects education and curriculum, and of the general education goals themselves. This report describes the findings of a committee charged with evaluating the way that this information is obtained, interpreted, disseminated, and used by the University community. This report serves as a companion piece to a separate document prepared by a committee concerned with identifying the goals of general education themselves.

A Description of the Current Process

On six occasions between 1991 and 1999, the extent to which graduating seniors have achieved KU's general educational goals has been assessed by the following process. The process is administered by the KU Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP).

Student selection and recruitment. Each year, between 146 and 181 students was contacted about their willingness to be interviewed and assessed. Each student was offered \$25 as an inducement to participate in the process. Typically, a stratified sample of 70 to 100 students has completed the process during the years when assessment was conducted. The size and the composition of the sample have been affected by students declining the invitation to participate, and students who have agreed to participate failing to appear. Currently, students are chosen from among the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the various professional schools, with the specific academic majors and units evaluated rotating from year to year.

Faculty selection and recruitment. For each evaluation process, a pool of faculty evaluators was created by drawing upon volunteers, often nominated by departmental chairs. Approximately 60 faculty participate each year, and each participating faculty member typically interviews from 3 to 6 students, working in teams of typically three faculty members per student. Several orientation sessions are offered prior to the interview sessions and faculty are strongly encouraged to attend.

Portfolio provision. A portfolio was created for each student and provided to three faculty evaluators prior to the interview. The portfolio currently consists of (1) an ARTS form indicating the course work (without grades) of the student to be interviewed, (2) an essay that the student has written, (3) the results of a written self-assessment of academic skills prepared by the participant, and (4) a goal attainment survey, in which the students are asked to rank the importance of, and rate KU's effectiveness in attaining, 35 institutional goals.

The interview. Faculty are provided a set of interview questions, each of which is intended to prompt students to make comments that allow the faculty team to assess the extent to which the student exhibits the skills and knowledge specified in the goals. During the 45-minute interview, the faculty sample from among these interview questions and make follow-up statements and inquiries. The questions provide some structure to the interview, but the interviews are intended to be "open-ended." After the interview is completed, the three participating faculty members score the extent to which the student has demonstrated a low or high attainment of each goal on a ten-point scale.

Post-interview. Following the four-day sequence of interviews, the data collected during the process are collected. A written summary of the data is compiled, and made available to the KU administration and to the Deans of the schools involved in the process that particular year. In turn, the Deans are encouraged to share the information with their faculty. Finally, OIRP offers one or more debriefing sessions to which the participating faculty are invited.

How the Assessment Process Was Examined

Most of the initial discussion of the committee concerned whether the numerical data were statistically valid, if the background/essay/interview technique was the best way to obtain the data, and what kinds of conclusions could be drawn from it. In addition to carefully reviewing and discussing the process, the committee carried out the following tasks.

- Data that has been collected through the process were examined, focusing on the last few years.
- A survey of 152 faculty members known to have participated in the process (the "Participant Survey") was carried out during February 2000. Of these surveys, 65 responses, or 43%, were returned.
- The committee carried out and analyzed a less detailed survey of the general faculty (the "General Survey") during the same time frame as the Participant Survey. A total of 175 of approximately 950 surveys sent out (18%) were returned.
- Committee members also contacted student participants by telephone to inquire about their impressions of the process (the "Student Survey"). Approximately 30 students were contacted.
- This committee, along with the Goals committee, conducted several open forum discussions ("town meetings") in the late fall of 2000 for the university community. In addition, several committee members a meeting of the Deans of the various colleges of the University and another meeting with the Associate Deans.

Are the Results of the Assessment Process Reliable and Accurate?

It is recognized that no assessment process is going to be perfect and, conversely, that there are likely to be merits in even the least accurate assessment process. In particular, there seems to be a strong sentiment that the process is interesting and enjoyable for faculty and students alike, with 75% of the faculty participants who responded to the survey reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "I enjoyed the process." The need for a rigorous evaluation depends on how the information obtained will be used. Thus, even an "impressionistic" view of the general education preparedness of our students may be useful, and in general, the engagement of senior students in discussion is valuable for the faculty interviewers. However, a considerable institutional commitment of time and money is invested in this process, and any non-trivial use of the data should be supported by an acceptable level of scientific validity (e.g., for use in making curricular decisions).

A number of areas of concern have been identified with respect to the accuracy and reliability of the process. The following three items are considered by the committee to be the most serious issues.

- **Small sample sizes and the problem of representative samples.** The small sample size (of 70 to 100 subjects) means that there are large standard errors in the underlying parameters of the measures of performance in each area, for each year. Wide confidence intervals translate into difficulties in making three kinds of comparison that would be desirable: (1) comparisons of effectiveness in achieving the various goals, (2) longitudinal comparisons (are we improving or getting worse in achieving our goals?), or (3) comparisons between units. Because we currently draw a sample each year from students within three units of the university, it is tempting to determine how one unit is doing compared to the others being sampled. But the samples within each unit are never over 30 students, and so standard errors for each unit are more than twice that of the entire sample, leading to even less confidence about underlying population parameters.

It is also possible that there are systematic differences between the general population of graduating seniors and those who are enticed to participate by the \$25 inducement (and between all seniors and those who actually show up for the interview). To be valid, it is important that the sample be as representative of the KU student population as possible. It should also be noted that although the students are surveyed in the traditional "senior" year, many students take longer to receive their degree. Despite this, the committee recognizes the challenge inherent in getting students to participate and commends OIRP for their efforts to ensure a broadly representative sample.

- **Questionable reliability of faculty assessments of student performance.** The open-ended nature of the interview requires that assessments of student performance be subjective, involving summary judgments by the participating faculty members. Such a measurement procedure is not inherently invalid or unreliable – if the assigned scores are measuring the goal that they are intended to assess and if there is sufficient inter-subjective agreement among the coders. But we are concerned that these two conditions are not sufficiently met. The present interview format seems to have several deficiencies that threaten the reliability and validity of the measures provided by faculty coders. First, students are asked different questions by different evaluators. Consequently, differences in student responses may reflect differences in the questions asked more than differences in their goal attainment. Second, students are given no specific guidance about the goals that particular questions seek to assess. Thus, a student may respond in a manner that emphasizes different goals than those of interest to the evaluators. Lastly, most of the goals are inherently multi-dimensional. For example, Goal 4 from the 1989 list is "[to enhance] sensitivity to the social, political, and environmental issues that confront the world." Suppose that a student is highly sensitive to environmental issues but insensitive to social and political issues. Even if the student's comments reflect these differences, a faculty member who is impressed by his environmental sensitivity may score the student high on Goal 4 while a faculty member who is concerned with his political insensitivity may score the student low on the same goal.

Finally, faculty differ widely in their approach to the interviews. Many adopt a conversational tone whereas others treat the interviews as more of a testing situation. Obviously, the tenor of the interviews can have a significant effect on both the students' responses and the faculty ratings.

An analysis of faculty coding of students in 1999 shows that 78% of the time, the differences between any two faculty in scoring student performance are 2 or less on the 10-point scale. Only 8% of the time do faculty differ in scoring students on a particular goal by 3 points or more. An often-employed measure of reliability, Cronbach's alpha, suggests that these differences are acceptable, but there may be other interpretations. Even so, the committee feels that this point is sufficiently worrisome to suggest that some revisions in conducting and scoring the interviews be considered.

- **What is the "KU Difference"?** Measures of students' performance at the end of their years at KU in the absence of measures of their performance at the beginning of their KU experience (i.e. without a pre-test) make difficult estimates of "the KU difference." The present manner in which the interviews are currently constructed complicate matters because the questions asked do not directly inquire into student exposure to, and instruction about, the goals during his/her enrollment at KU. There is no way of assessing whether students who perform highly with respect to particular goals would have performed highly without experiencing a KU education.

A number of lesser concerns follow.

- **Biases resulting from the interview mechanism itself.** It has been suggested that the interviews are a highly artificial situation. Specifically, it is reasonable to suspect that some students may be uncomfortable in the three-on-one situation.
- **Issues of construct validity,** or are the resulting measures related to other factors in a theoretically satisfying way (do the results lead to *useful predictions*)? In principle, this concern could be readily addressed by comparing the data obtained to other information, much of which is already being obtained (grades, self-assessments). The careful comparison of data obtained from these various sources would be relevant not only to this particular issue but would be reassuring with respect to the overall question of accuracy.

A related item concerns the interviewers' use of the material provided in the portfolio. Many respondents to the Participant Survey noted that they thought the information provided before the interviews was useful. However, a number also suggested that there was not sufficient time to read the essays or examine the records or, conversely, that the material caused a bias (even though grades are not included in the portfolios).

- **Longitudinal analysis of trends.** One purpose of conducting these assessments is to determine if KU is improving (or getting worse) in meeting our general education goals. We acknowledge the small sample sizes complicate inferences involving comparisons of mean scores over time. However, there is another problem: changes in student performance over time may be due to a variety of factors that occur in the broader social environment, rather than to the KU experience. Alternatively, changes may be due to aspects of the KU experience other than classes concerned with general education.

- **Lack of comparable data from other institutions.** The way data on student performance is collected provides no basis for assessing how KU compares with other universities and no basis for examining the factors that make KU relatively effective or ineffective.

How Might the Process Be Changed?

The committee discussed a spectrum of changes, including replacing the interview system with an alternative, such as requiring all entering and graduating students to take standardized exams measuring their general education performance. On balance, the committee stops short of recommending these changes. This is largely because of doubts that appropriate instruments exist and the fact that the use of standardized tests would require a thorough consideration of numerous social questions (e.g., racial bias) and educational issues (e.g., instructional purposes). On the other hand, the idea of a web- or classroom-based self-assessment that would supplement, rather than replace, the interview as a primary assessment vehicle, has merit.

Instead of such alternative methods of assessment, the present system could be reformed and supplemented. Possibilities include:

- **To increase the sample size and to compare the results obtained from the current process, a paper or internet-based self-assessment could be given to both first- and fourth-year students.**

This would greatly increase the number of students that are involved in the process, it would help to address the “value added” question, and would be extremely useful in validating the results of the interviews by comparison with the larger sample. If the data obtained from the interview process suggest that student self-assessments are accurate, and if the self-assessment survey corresponds to the goal-attainment survey, then the results of this larger survey could be employed to generate the larger samples needed to obtain more precise measurements of population means and to make comparisons. It would make sense to conduct the entry version of the survey in the Orientation Seminar (PRE 101). There are opportunities for tagging participants in the fourth academic year or later, such as by requiring that students complete a survey to complete major certification. However, it would be inappropriate to place the onus of collecting these data onto individual departments or schools.

- **The interview process should be revised.** Two suggestions were discussed, keeping in mind that there needs to be a balance between reproducibility between faculty coders and flexibility to follow up on points raised by the students in their answers to the “canned” questions.

Some suggestions for fine-tuning. There is little direct connection between the goals and the questions that have been traditionally used for assessing them. Minimally, there should be fewer questions, and those used should more directly and explicitly be related to the specific goals. The committee notes that it may be particularly challenging to assess competence with goals that are intrinsically broad in scope. There are two particular sub-issues that we wish to bring to the attention of OIRP. First, it is important to recognize the need for balance between

assessment of factual knowledge with the subtler probing of intellectual skills by interviewers. Secondly, it is difficult to adequately assess more than a few goals in a relatively short interview session. Inevitably, a compromise between coverage of several goals and the depth to which any given goal is investigated must be made.

An alternative. Scrap the 21 open-ended (and multifaceted) questions. Instead, have the students “tell some stories” about KU experiences dealing with each of the new goals. Tell them before the interview that they will be invited to tell a story – in two or three minutes – about a KU experience that best reflects their exposure to each goal. Faculty coders would then have two or three minutes to ask follow-up questions about each story, including whether the story is representative of their other KU experiences regarding that goal. Compared to the present procedures, this might: (a) reduce student anxiety, (b) enhance inter-coder reliability, as each faculty would be reacting to the same stimuli, (c) generate information that focuses on the KU experience, providing a better measure of “the value added” by KU, and (d) generate interesting data about particular programs, requirements, courses, and faculty that are most (and least) successful at achieving these goals in students.

- **Even without the benefit of additional instruments, greater reliability could be gained by cross-referencing all of the information that is obtained in the course of the overall process.** For example, it may be informative to know how the interview affects faculty assessments, or how GPA correlates with student assessments and the scores from the interviews.
- **Vigilance for statistical validity must be constantly maintained, with the aid of expert assistance if necessary.**

The committee considered several other reforms, but there was less enthusiasm for the following measures.

- **The number of students interviewed should be increased.** While this has obvious attractions, the size would have to be substantially increased to obtain significantly more precise estimates of population means. The increased costs (administrative, faculty time, etc.) reduce the attractiveness of this option.
- **More training should be provided to faculty participants,** seeking more standardization in the interview format and in coding. However, faculty willingness to participate in such training is doubtful, especially given their voluntary participation. Alternatively, it might be desirable to include assessment experts on (perhaps selected) interview teams.
- **Clarify the issue of whether faculty coders should discuss ratings prior to assigning them.** Such discussion seems to sometimes occur now, raising questions about reliability and the meaning of reliability coefficients. Discussion could be useful, however, in a variety of ways, such as reducing the number of “harsh” and “lenient” coders.

How Should the Information Be Disseminated and Utilized?

Given the effort put forward for assessment, the committee feels that the information *should* be disseminated and utilized. Unfortunately, our best information to date indicates that neither is currently taking place to a degree commensurate with the resources being invested in the process. Consider the responses to the following questions on the General Survey:

- Prior to receiving this survey, were you aware of the University's General Education Assessment Goals? *No: 59%*
- Have you been informed of the results from previous assessment sessions? *No: 87%*
- If [you were informed on the results of previous sessions,] have you used the information in your teaching or curriculum planning? *No: 90%*

And the following result from the Participant Survey:

- I have been provided feedback reports/findings from the assessment sessions. *Strongly disagree/disagree: 55%*

As of now, the general education assessment does not appear to have a significant impact on instruction or curriculum at the University of Kansas. The finding that many of our colleagues are not even aware of the goals for general education strongly suggests that the potential inherent in a suitably revised process is in danger of being wasted. We suggest that the following actions be considered.

- **A clear and public commitment to the goals of general education and the value of their assessment should be made, and regularly affirmed, by the Chancellor, Provost, Deans, and other leaders of the KU academic community.** In large part, the assessment is carried out because the Regents of the State of Kansas consider general education to be a critical feature of an education obtained from a Regents institution.
- **A university-wide long-range plan with respect to the assessment and implementation of general education should be formulated.**
- **A university-wide dialogue on the goals of general education and how they fit into the university experience should be held.** Most importantly, the goals of general education are not likely to be embraced by a faculty who have not been involved in their formulation or are left out of the discussion of how they should be met.
- **Individual units should regularly consider their contributions to general education,** keeping in mind that a balance must be struck between competency in the major and broader concerns. However, some aspects of general education do permeate even the most specialized curriculum and these should be recognized.
- **Faculty participation should be encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded,** inasmuch as the more faculty are involved in the process the greater the awareness of general education is likely to be. Given the relatively large number of faculty who cited time as an impediment to

participating, one minor adjustment would be to give faculty earlier warning as to when the assessment will be held.

- **The results of the general education assessment must be made more readily available** to the faculty who are expected to implement them, to the University community at large, and to the People of the State of Kansas. Upon completion of each year's assessment, every attempt should be made to publicize the results through the media. General data and feedback from the process should be made available on the Internet (with care to respect issues of privacy).
- **The existence of these goals and, more importantly, the benefits of a well-rounded education should be emphasized to students at all levels, beginning with first-year student orientation.**

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Appendix

- I. a. Survey Sent to Previous Assessment Faculty Participants**
 - b. Results of Participant Survey**
- II. a. General Survey Sent to Entire KU Faculty**
 - b. Results of General Survey**
- III. Summary of Survey of Former Student Participants**

Results from Participant Survey

Questions 1 and 2: Demographics of Respondents

Assistant Professor: **5**
Associate Professor: **27**
Professor: **31**
Other: **2**

A total of **37** responses came from the various departments of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The following schools or units were represented by **1-6** returned surveys: Architecture and Urban Design, Business, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Journalism, Libraries, Pharmacy, Social Welfare.

Question 3: How many times have you participated in the process?

1: **12**
2: **27**
3: **17**
4: **8**
5: **1**

Question 4a: Having the written information available in advance of the interview (ARTS form, student essay, Goal Attainment Survey, and Self-Assessment Form) is useful in assessing goal attainment.

Strongly Agree: **29**
Agree: **23**
Neutral: **6**
Disagree: **5**
Strongly Disagree: **1**

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

- (1) having material ahead of time provides basis for questions, a place to start from (12)
- (2) alleviates time during/between interviews, allows for more review (3)
- (3) would not read (1)
- (4) assessment comes from interview, not paperwork; paperwork not necessarily feasible during interview (3)
- (5) not enough time to read it (2)
- (6) “info causes a bias....A two phase approach where interview feedback is compared with written materials would be better and help refine written material...”
- (7) “student essays ranged from poor to excellent with regard to effort. most were not up to speed with interview process, [leaving] us explaining instead of interviewing”

Question 4b: The current format of the 45-minute interview is a useful way to assess goal attainment.

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

Strongly Agree: **14**

Agree: **35**

Neutral: **6**

Disagree: **8**

Strongly Disagree: **2**

- time is pressed (3)
- more student preparation needed, clearer expectations coming into interview (3)
- individual differences in students' experiences and uniqueness of interviews lessen usefulness of evaluation (5)
- works well, impactful and insightful (5)
- personal inability to assess the method (2)
- faculty members may hinder process: group chemistry, set agendas or other problems (4)
- useful, but not effective; helps to form opinions, at least (2)
- questions need to be more focused rather than "tangential", too reflective of faculty (2)
- more interesting interviews have come from deviation from set questions

Question 5: The process accurately measures the quality of General Education at KU:

Strongly Agree: **1**

Agree: **18**

Neutral: **24**

Disagree: **18**

Strongly Disagree: **4**

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

- I have no way of assessing this (7)
- not necessarily statistically accurate: self-selected group, small sample (7)
- no baseline upon entry for comparison, was this knowledge gained at KU? (8)
- student dependent (4)
- faculty dependent (2)
- process too flawed, questions too broad (2)
- value of gen ed not realized, discussed in the university
- how do you define education and assess it in 45 minutes? (2)
- works ok, but "complicated by widely different gen.ed. requirements"
- "seems to favor a...limited expression of general education...it doesn't measure what I call 'cope-ability'"

Question 6: Overall, the process works well.

Strongly Agree: **8**
Agree: **28**
Neutral: **17**
Disagree: **12**
Strongly Disagree:**0**

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

- I have no way of assessing this (3)
- no baseline on entry for comparison (2)
- enjoyable (2)
- what is the use of these?
- depends on the student or discipline (3)
- need faculty prep, as some are unprepared/late (2)
- depends on faculty dynamic (2)
- leisurely and relaxed way to talk with students - even more so if held in different environment
- may come to reveal weaknesses and strengths over the years
- very time consuming (2)
- "KU needs to make sure public and students know about this investment and our quality objectives"

Question 7: I have been provided adequate feedback reports/findings from the assessment sessions.

Strongly Agree: **7**
Agree: **13**
Neutral: **9**
Disagree: **21**
Strongly Disagree:**15**

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

- do not remember receiving/did not receive feedback (15)
- feedback lacking (2)
- do not need feedback (1)
- statistical results would be interesting (2)
- annual feedback to the school of engineering would be more helpful
- "the best feedback is face to face - not statistical"

Question 8: I enjoyed being a part of the General Education Assessment sessions.

Strongly Agree: **28**

Agree: **21**

Neutral: **10**

Disagree: **6**

Strongly Disagree: **0**

The following specific comments appeared on the noted number of questionnaires:

- (1) enjoyable, informative (8)
- (2) only downside is time commitment (2)
- (3) enjoyed working with variety of faculty (7)
- (4) enjoyed talking with undergrads (also, outside of department) (5)
- (5) "waste of time" (2)
- (6) a boring process that intimidates students
- (7) my favorite service activity
- (8) KU community is trying to improve gen ed...it is exciting to try and move the process along

Question 9: If you could suggest or recommend any improvements/changes in the General Assessment Process, what would they be?

The following specific comments were received:

- frustrated...never translates to change on school level, but personally helpful
- if all students took GRE, we'd know more
- explore more cost effective ways
- perhaps could also involve general public/business leaders more as engineering does
- is time commitment worth the little amount of information gleaned?
- both faculty and students need to be more up to speed on what is going on when arriving (2)
- preference to luncheon meetings as opposed to evenings
- minimize no-shows...otherwise big waste of time
- develop better questions, survey on Saturday afternoons?
- "it's good, if imperfect as is"
- I am impressed; well thought out and works well
- to get good measure, must interview 1st semester fresh, then same group graduating (6)
- might want to talk to students after have been out 2-4 years (2)
- don't pay students
- don't include professional school students in same group
- need to publicize 11 criteria better, esp. to principal course instructors (2)
- more time to preview written, format too intimidating for students and to varied
- now looks like effort without clear purpose, need to improve what we do (3)
- more current, intelligent questions
- I have used process to improve advising skills
- not sufficient for accurate evaluation...need objective test component

- web-based surveys of fresh/senior may ease process of acquiring data
- the faculty would not let the student answer the questions...answer for or interrupt
- needs more participants
- what is the point? does anything actually come of it?
- “I believe that any survey preparation...should be able to anticipate answers, the level of merit and possible directions”
- “stop pretending that students in the professional schools...are getting a general education. It is unfair to them to attempt to illicit the kinds of things the survey looks for....the process [is personally] fun, but I think it is basically a University PR play to satisfy the Regents

Results from General Survey

Questions 1 and 2: Demographics of Respondents

Assistant Professor: **40**
Associate Professor: **52**
Professor: **70**
Other: **14**

A total of **88** responses came from the various departments of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Faculty from the School of Engineering sent in **22** surveys, **14** were received by individuals reporting from the School of Education, and **11** from the School of Fine Arts. The following schools or units were represented by **2-8** returned surveys: Architecture and Urban Design, Business, Engineering, Journalism, Law, Libraries, Medicine, Pharmacy, Social Welfare. A total of **176** surveys were received.

Question 3: Prior to receiving this survey, were you aware of the University's General Education Goals?

Yes: **70** (40%)
No: **106** (60%)

Question 4: Have you ever been invited to participate in the assessment process as an interviewer?

Yes: **22** (12%)
No: **153** (88%)

Follow-up: If so, why did you not participate.

There were very few written responses to this question, but by far the most-cited reason (14 times) was that the respondent did not have the time. Other comments received included the following statements:

- (8) "Lack of time and my well-justified cynicism about KU's real interest in general ed."
- (9) "No longer teach classes and heard from other who had done it of disappointing student performances"
- (10) "I could see where it might be difficult to get colleagues to participate because of the perceived ineffectiveness of university committees."
- (11) "I volunteered but was not asked."

Question 5: Have you been informed of the results from previous assessment sessions?

Yes: **14** (8%)
No: **139** (80%)
Not sure: **23** (13%)

Follow-up: If so, how was this information provided.

The following answers were supplied by one respondent each:

- At a faculty meeting
- From a colleague
- From department chain (photocopies relevant pages of report)
- General University publications

Follow-up: If so, how have you used this information in your teaching or curriculum planning?

- (9) Have not used the information (2 responses)
- (10) "I would suggest that faculty, particularly those (e.g., chairs) that have influence with curriculum changes, be given the results of the survey.
- (11) "We are updating curriculum. I have revised my syllabi in light of assessments."
- (12) "Constantly. Would be absurd not to use feedback. The larger University, however, only hears of a small fraction."

Finally, the following comments were among those offered by various respondents.

- "We need to be informed as to what the deficiencies are for students that graduate from KU."
- "Seems...that big mass-produced degrees of "vague content" suffer from assessment difficulties."
- "I think the scarce resources spent on assessments are misappropriated given the inadequate resources available to support undergraduate teaching."
- "Not enough emphasis on knowledge integration between biology...and the humanities."
- "I tried to find these goals on the KU site but didn't find them. Given the outrageous amount of info/papers we receive daily we tend to skim through a lot of mail."
- "(1) If anyone at KU were interested in really knowing about the success of general education at KU, rather than appearances, a different methodology would be adopted. (2) When was the last thoughtful university-wide discussion of what a University education should be? Never. So why suppose this issue is important?"
- "There is a danger that the breadth of the goals leads to a shallow curriculum outside the major. I am concerned about the...general education requirements in this regard. Does/can the assessment recognize depth of knowledge outside the major?"
- "I would keep the goals succinct, but have some clear indicators for each goal to use when interviewing students. The goals should be announced and discussed at school and college-level meeting and, once approved, distributed widely to faculty and students."

Summary of Survey of Former Student Participants

Several members of the committee were able to contact roughly 30 students who had participated in the 1999 General Education Assessment by telephone. Given the relatively small sample size, numerical scores were not analyzed. Rather, four overall questions were asked. These questions, along with the qualitative spectrum of responses and some representative comments as reported by the interviewers, are given below.

Question 1: Do you recall your involvement in the General Education Assessment process at KU? It took place in an evening at the Union, you wrote an essay and filled out some forms, and you were interviewed by a panel of (usually) three faculty members.

Almost all of the students remembered the assessment and the interview. In a few cases, it was reported that interviewee's memory was jogged when reminded of the \$25.00 payment.

Question 2: How did you feel about the process at the time? Did you enjoy it?

Most of the students stated that they did enjoy the process, although many also noted that they felt as though they were "on the spot" or under pressure to "do well". Several students noted that they enjoyed having the chance to speak to professors under these circumstances, although a number also noted that some of their interviewers were unfriendly and seemed judgmental.

Question 3: Do you think this process allowed your interviewers to accurately assess what you learned at KU?

The answers to this question were mixed. Some of the students felt that they were able to get across their perceived strengths, but many noted that the questions seemed sketchy or unconnected with their KU experience. Some specific comments as noted by interviewees (and paraphrased by the telephone interviewers) are noted below.

- (12) Enjoyed having the conversation, although a faculty member did not agree with my views
- (13) They could tell a lot by the way that I presented myself.
- (14) I think so...they questions were very general.
- (15) Yes on the classroom part of learning, but I learned outside the classroom, too.
- (16) Lots of questions were in the humanities, which I had taken early in my senior year.
- (17) For four years, hard to assess in a short period.
- (18) Didn't speak to the issues that face [a particular professional school major].
- (19) Feel good about KU education. The interviewer did not get what I learned. Felt tense because questions felt "off the wall".
- (20) Was comfortable, which I didn't expect.
- (21) More high school than college. Learned scientific method in high school!
- (22) Too much political science and western civilization – I didn't have those courses.
- (23) Not really tested as was asked the right questions.

Question 4: Do you have any suggestions for improvements in the process?

Some specific comments are noted below.

- Maybe ask about career objectives and how KU education contributed to career.
- Would like more feedback. A letter afterwards would have been helpful. (Comment made on several occasions.)
- Interview more than one student at a time, to make it more interactive.
- Have [professional school] professor in attendance – someone that will appreciate the issues of my program.
- Avoid doing the assessment during midterms.
- Do as a sophomore or junior.
- Tell us the purpose of doing the assessment beforehand.
- Essay was vague. Interview OK.
- I wanted to share views about my school. [A specific professional school] is not well rounded.
- Wait until the last year of programs lasting more than four years.
- Not really tested - they weren't asking the right questions.

Acknowledgment. The committee expresses its thanks to the KU Alumni Association for their help in locating recent interviewees.