

General Education Redesign: Connecting Curriculum and Belonging to Student Success

Kean University

ABOUT

Kean University, a public institution in New Jersey, is a proud partner in EAB's Moon Shot for Social & Economic Mobility, a regional effort aimed at eliminating equity gaps and accelerating student success. As part of this transformative work, Kean launched a bold redesign of its General Education (GE) curriculum to better support first-year students.

In 2024, Kean's Teaching and Learning leadership team implemented a new interdisciplinary, community-based GE model rooted in evidence-based high-impact practices. The goal: build a stronger sense of connection—for both students and faculty—and improve outcomes from day one.

CHALLENGE

Many Kean students face substantial challenges during their first semester, often leading to poor academic performance and attrition. Absenteeism, low grades, and high DFW rates are especially common in required courses such as English Composition. These academic difficulties are compounded by limited access to student support services, particularly for students taught by adjunct faculty, who comprise a significant portion of the instructional workforce.

Additionally, there is often a disconnect between advisement and academic affairs, making it harder for students to form the peer and faculty relationships that are known to support persistence. These early signals of disengagement frequently set students on a path toward stopping out.

SOLUTION

Kean responded by launching a two-year effort to reimagine the General Education experience. In Fall 2024, the university piloted its redesigned GE curriculum with 110 first-time students and 21 faculty members.

KEY RESULTS



▶ **91%**

GE Pilot students were retained from Fall to Spring at a 91% rate—outpacing historical trends for first-time students.

▶ **3x**

GE Pilot students were three times more likely to access academic tutoring in Eng. 1030.

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

- *Integrated Themes:* Courses connected by interdisciplinary threads—Migration, Sustainability, and Civic Engagement
- *Learning Communities:* Students and faculty traveled through courses as a cohort, fostering deeper relationships
- *Real-World Connections:* Students participated in shared experiences both on and off campus
- *Embedded Support:* In-class advisement and tutoring services, particularly in English 1030, were built into the curriculum
- *Faculty Development:* All instructors participated in a semester-long Course Design Institute to align pedagogy and priorities
- *Early Belonging:* Instructional activities that promote belonging began before the first day of class.

IMPACT

Compared to their peers, GE Pilot students demonstrated notable gains in academic performance, connection to the campus community, and persistence.

91% Enrollment & Retention

91% of GE Pilot students persisted from FA24 to SP25. Most registered for 12+ (98%) or 15+ (77%) credits and reported stronger faculty connections, course relevance, and intent to stay at Kean (90%).

0% Adjunct Instructors

GE Pilot students were taught by 0% adjuncts compared to non-Pilot students who had an 85% chance of having only adjunct instructors in their first semester.

3.08 Academic Performance

Average GPA of CAPS students in the GE Pilot; GE Pilot students were also less likely to have ended Fall 2024 with a GPA < 2.0.

3X Support Resources

GE Pilot students in English 1030 were three times more likely to attend tutoring. They were also more likely to meet with a professional advisor and less likely to trigger alert referrals.



STUDENT VOICES & FEEDBACK

The transition from high school wasn't as scary with people always around to support us.

It was easier to make friends and ask for help—everyone was familiar.

We saw each other in every class. It made me feel like I belonged.

Everything felt connected. Professors knew what we were doing in other courses.



FACULTY REFLECTIONS

- Faculty cited **greater camaraderie, interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovation in course design**
- Consistent interaction helped faculty **build deeper relationships** and better support student needs
- Many appreciated the **creative freedom** and observed **stronger student engagement** and **cross-course alignment**



First-time, first-year students at Kean entered into a learning community that connected content to universal themes, led students on- and off-campus for real-world experiences, and forged caring relationships that made students feel connected.”

— Dr. Laura Baecher

ASSOC. PROVOST, FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

WHAT'S NEXT

Following the success of the Fall 2024 pilot, Kean plans to expand the redesigned General Education model to serve more first-year students in future semesters. By continuing to invest in faculty collaboration, embedded support, and interdisciplinary learning, Kean is creating a first-year experience that fosters belonging, drives academic success, and keeps students on the path to graduation.