

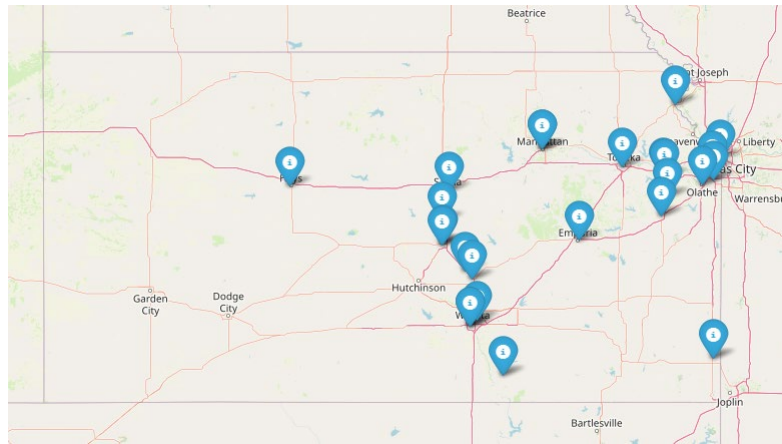
In-Person Degree Completion in Southwest Kansas

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As the land-grant university for the state of Kansas, Kansas State University exists to serve all residents of the state. Yet, the main campus in Manhattan, and branch campuses in Salina and Olathe, are all located in the northeast quadrant of Kansas. In contrast, while there are established community colleges in Garden City, Dodge City, and Liberal, Kansas, there are no public or private institutions granting four-year college degrees in the southwest quadrant of Kansas.

Figure 1. Location of public and private Kansas colleges and universities granting four-year degrees.



As a result, while the percentage of southwest Kansas residents with associate's degrees is the same as the rest of Kansas, the percentage of residents with four-year degrees is half of any other part of the state. While southwest Kansas is sparsely populated overall, Garden City and Dodge City are growing rapidly, and are among the most ethnically diverse communities in Kansas. The economy of this region is built around large-scale commercial agriculture, including irrigated corn and hay production, cattle feeding, dairy farming, meat processing, and cheese manufacturing. Those industries sometimes struggle to hire enough university graduates to meet their workforce needs.

Kansas State University operates several agricultural research and extension centers across the state, including one in Garden City. We offer some fully online programs, but there is unmet demand for in-person bachelor's degree completion programs. Thus, the intent of this project is to develop partnerships to deliver four-year degrees in agriculture and other areas, on-site in Garden City, Kansas, over 250 miles from the K-State Manhattan campus.

To develop new programs to meet these needs, new partnerships were developed. Along with the College of Agriculture at K-State in Manhattan, the Colleges of Education, and Health and

Human Sciences have also contributed to the project plan. In Southwest Kansas, key partners include Garden City Community College (GCCC), the K-State Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Garden City, and the Finney County Economic Development Corporation (FDEDCC).

One of the goals of the project was to create greater opportunities for utilization of transfer credits from community colleges, and to allow more student choice in their course options. A new K-State bachelor's degree program in Diversified Agriculture is currently in the final phases of approval by the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR). This degree program will allow students to choose an area of specialization among any discipline of agriculture. Assuming KBOR approval, the new degree will be available in Manhattan and online in Fall semester 2025, and primarily in-person in Garden City beginning in Fall 2026.

To provide these courses in Garden City, a hybrid model is proposed. Some lecture classes will be offered synchronously in both Manhattan and Garden City, using the latest technology. Some laboratories currently offered only in Manhattan will have an in-person lab section available in Garden City. While FCEDC aims to develop a new educational facility for such projects, the initial K-State courses will be offered at GCCC and/or the Garden City Agricultural Research and Extension center. Undoubtedly, some courses will need to be taken in a fully online asynchronous format by Garden City students, but the goal is to provide synchronous course delivery whenever possible.

As these new programs were developed, it was important to assure our partners that we would not duplicate course offerings or create redundancies. Only upper-level K-State courses will be offered in Garden City, while we rely on GCCC to provide the lower-division courses. K-State and GCCC will explore the possibility of joint appointments of faculty between institutions and develop agreements to mutually support student success.

While the program should be self-sustaining once fully operational through additional enrollment and tuition, initial investments will be needed to hire an on-site program coordinator, advisor, and recruiter. An internal Academic Innovation Grant proposal was submitted at K-State to seek funding for some costs of delivering courses in Garden City. A memorandum of agreement between K-State and GCCC was signed in December 2024, indicating both institutions' commitment to the partnership. Other degree completion programs such as secondary education are envisioned in the next phase of the program.

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