

Task Force Report with Recommendations

Teaching and Learning

April 8, 2008

Modified May 8, 2008

Introduction

On January 29, 2008, Chancellor Robert Hemenway convened the Initiative 2015 task forces to officially kick off the planning process and charge the task forces. The task forces met over the next two months to develop the recommendations contained in this report.

Teaching and Learning Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Educational Expectations

The University of Kansas will communicate clearly – to current and prospective students -- the set of characteristics expected of undergraduate, graduate and professional students in order to succeed at KU. These characteristics (see appendix) include high-quality academic performance, scholarly engagement, participation in extracurricular activities and service to the community. KU will also communicate these expectations to all other educational stakeholders. While these characteristics are not requirements, they do represent a higher and broader measure for students and the university to use in assessing admission and enrollment choices. Further, KU should seek authority to implement comprehensive undergraduate admissions standards that are consistent with these characteristics.

Recommendation 2: Defining Learner Outcomes

Every academic program at the University of Kansas will have clear and measurable objectives -- goals that indicate the expected outcome of a KU undergraduate, graduate or professional education. These objectives extend beyond degree programs, and will reflect the overarching goals of a KU education, addressing both the academic achievements and the personal characteristics that serve as hallmarks of a KU graduate (see appendix). Academic programs and KU as a whole will examine educational practices -- inside and outside of class -- to ensure those practices align with the stated goals.

Recommendation 3: Enhancing the Educational Experience

The faculty of the University of Kansas will utilize teaching methods and learning strategies that improve the learning environment for all students. These are methods and strategies validated by research, and include 1) incorporating required small-group learning communities into all KU programs, 2) integrating appropriate active learning strategies into the instruction of all disciplines, 3) promoting peer mentoring and instruction involving advanced students, 4) offering a diverse group of one-credit seminar courses that ease student transitions and promote academic engagement, and 5) supporting the professional development of KU faculty as they reflect on and improve their teaching practices. These strategies will strengthen the partnership among students, faculty and staff as they engage in the process of learning.

Recommendation 4: Documenting Learner Outcomes

The University of Kansas will demonstrate that undergraduate, graduate and professional students have met the overarching goals of a KU education (see appendix). This will happen in multiple ways. KU will support individual academic programs as they identify and develop specific documentation and evaluation tools. This support includes incentives to faculty and departments to define outcomes, develop assessment tools, and implement and utilize the results in order to improve their academic programs.

Recommendation 5: Diversity of the Learning Environment

The University of Kansas will be a more diverse learning environment -- including students, faculty and staff -- that reflects the changing demographics of the state and nation. KU must be mindful of the value all aspects of diversity bring to the university and its learning environment. This includes geographic, socio-economic, first-generation and language diversity. Achieving this goal will require a partnership with K-12 education, local communities and others to ensure

preparedness and develop multiple pathways to a college education. It will also require increased efforts in student recruitment, targeted scholarship funding, and a high degree of first-year and ongoing support. The recruitment of international students will also receive greater attention, along with the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty and staff.

Background and Rationale of Recommendations *Teaching and Learning Task Force*

Recommendation 1: Educational Expectations

Recommendation: The University of Kansas will communicate clearly – to current and prospective students -- the set of characteristics expected of undergraduate, graduate and professional students in order to succeed at KU. These characteristics (see appendix) include high-quality academic performance, scholarly engagement, participation in extracurricular activities and service to the community. KU will also communicate these expectations to all other educational stakeholders. While these characteristics are not requirements, they do represent a higher and broader measure for students and the university to use in assessing admission and enrollment choices. Further, KU should seek authority to implement comprehensive undergraduate admissions standards that are consistent with these characteristics.

Background: The characteristics necessary for success at KU transcend current basic state admissions standards. These expectations should be articulated as a positive challenge to current and prospective students, not as an obstacle to admission or graduation.

KU wants all of its students to succeed. Degree completion is an important measure of how well KU and its students have achieved their goals. Success hinges on solid academic preparation in foundational skills. In addition, students who become actively engaged in scholarly inquiry, and who work to improve the welfare of others while enrolled, often are more successful academically and find their college years more rewarding. Finally, academic success requires a level of emotional maturity that enables students to make good choices among an array of activities that compete for time and attention.

KU's basic undergraduate admissions standards, by themselves, do not adequately convey to students the university's high expectations. To thrive at KU, students must possess characteristics that exceed the minimum statutory requirements. Failure to communicate these expectations clearly -- to students, their families, guidance counselors, school districts and others -- does a disservice to everyone. The same is true for KU's graduate and professional programs, each of which sets its own expectations and admissions standards.

Rationale: Articulating expectations clearly will enhance the overall quality of those seeking admission to KU. In turn, this will increase the likelihood that a student will benefit fully from the opportunity to study and learn at KU. As a result, a higher percentage of students will graduate and more of them will have the hallmarks all KU alumni should aspire to possess (see appendix).

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Recommendation 2: Defining Learner Outcomes

Recommendation: *Every academic program at the University of Kansas will have clear and measurable objectives -- goals that indicate the expected outcome of a KU undergraduate, graduate or professional education. These objectives extend beyond degree programs, and will reflect the overarching goals of a KU education, addressing both the academic achievements and the personal characteristics that serve as hallmarks of a KU graduate (see appendix). Academic programs and KU as a whole will examine educational practices -- inside and outside of class -- to ensure those practices align with the stated goals.*

Background: The plan for a 2006-07 KU pilot test – “Documenting Undergraduate and Graduate Learning Success” – noted that “Department faculty often discuss what an accomplished student in their graduate program or undergraduate major should be like upon completion of a degree, including some mix of knowledge, skills, professional preparation, and ability to understand the world. This pilot program . . . provides an opportunity for units to take that conversation to another level by asking how well those goals are being accomplished.” This recommendation builds upon that initiative and seeks to extend it to the whole university.

Academic programs at KU are guided by a variety of goals and standards, starting with a set of defined general education goals for undergraduate studies. Many graduate and professional programs have accreditation bodies or professional associations that provide a structure of essential educational objectives. Nationally, higher education organizations at every level highlight the importance of defining learner outcomes for cognitive skills. Taken as a whole, it is possible for most KU programs at all levels to develop a framework to define broad types of learner outcomes. Periodically, all KU programs should re-evaluate their benchmarks and articulate objectives that are appropriate for their discipline.

Many undergraduate, graduate and professional programs at KU are already working to define specific degree objectives. The University has defined the goals of general education and regularly assesses those goals. It periodically reevaluates those goals based upon the assessment outcomes. In a similar manner, academic programs will define the core knowledge and skills students should attain in completing their degrees. Using the objectives, programs can use the framework to evaluate their success in meeting those objectives and refine their programs accordingly.

The value of this approach extends to such learning opportunities as student organizations, learning communities, Study Abroad, residence halls and other extracurricular or co-curricular activities. All of these activities have an educational dimension that will benefit from having clear and measurable objectives that align with KU’s general education goals.

Rationale: Using an overarching set of goals gives individual programs a framework for articulating learner outcomes. It can promote interdisciplinary collaboration among programs whose objectives are similar.

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Recommendation 3: Enhancing the Educational Experience

Recommendation: *The faculty of the University of Kansas will utilize teaching methods and learning strategies that improve the learning environment for all students. These are methods and strategies validated by research, and include 1) incorporating required small-group learning communities into all KU programs, 2) integrating appropriate active learning strategies into the instruction of all disciplines, 3) promoting peer mentoring and instruction involving advanced students, 4) offering a diverse group of one-credit seminar courses that ease student transitions and promote academic engagement, and 5) supporting the professional development of KU faculty as they reflect on and improve their teaching practices. These strategies will strengthen the partnership among students, faculty and staff as they engage in the process of learning.*

Background: Decades of research on human learning have identified strategies that promote learning among students, regardless of abilities and preferred learning styles. While many universities have been slow to incorporate these approaches, KU can take the lead in adopting evidence-based instructional methods that enhance student learning.

These approaches benefit students at all levels and in all phases of their academic careers. However, there are transition points that are especially critical to the ultimate success of students. Examples include the first year of undergraduate, graduate or professional school; the first year for transfer students; and the third year of medical school. Methods validated by research, such as those recommended above, are especially effective during these transitions.

Large-enrollment introductory lecture classes can be taught effectively in ways that engage students. Even so, new students -- incoming freshmen and transfers -- often find such classes daunting. Retention may suffer as a result. Students accustomed to small classes may question the quality of teaching in such classes as they make the adjustment to life at KU. The quality of the student learning experience benefits from the regular examination and improvement of instructional methods and the instructional environment. KU remains committed to fostering and valuing inquiry that results in the improvement of teaching.

The transition from undergraduate education to graduate education can be confusing for students. In addition to attaining knowledge, a graduate student must also contribute to the body of knowledge. This transition can be particularly difficult for international students.

Rationale: The anticipated outcomes of the use of teaching methods and strategies validated by research include increased retention of first-year and transfer students, improved student performance during transition times, and the more effective use of tuition dollars. Implicit in this recommendation is an obligation on the part of students to take greater responsibility for their own education. Efforts by the faculty to utilize methods and strategies that enhance the educational experience depend on students participating actively in the learning process. Ultimately, the student-teacher relationship is a partnership with mutual expectations, benefits and consequences.

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Recommendation 4: Documenting Learner Outcomes

Recommendation: *The University of Kansas will demonstrate that undergraduate, graduate and professional students have met the overarching goals of a KU education (see appendix). This will happen in multiple ways. KU will support individual academic programs as they identify and develop specific documentation and evaluation tools. This support includes incentives to faculty and departments to define outcomes, develop assessment tools, and implement and utilize the results in order to improve their academic programs.*

Background: A variety of methods are used to document learner outcomes at KU. For example, an innovative interview process helps assess seniors' mastery of the general education goals. In addition, the School of Medicine surveys graduates' residency program directors to compare the performance of its graduates to graduates of other medical schools. The oral defense of a dissertation is a more public example of documentation. As each academic program defines specific outcomes and adopts tools to assess these outcomes, these tools can be added to the senior interview, the residency survey and other existing evaluations to create an institutional portfolio.

In the portfolio approach, samples of student work from courses are gathered. These archives are reviewed for program- and institutional-level achievement, using standards and criteria provided by KU faculty or external organizations. At KU, there are many examples of programs that review archives/portfolios of student work. They use benchmarks defined within the field or profession to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their academic programs.

Standardized tests of general intellectual skill in undergraduate education can complement, but cannot replace, a more comprehensive assessment. KU's overarching goals, and the individual program objectives under those goals, do not lend themselves to documentation by traditional standardized testing alone. Documenting the hallmarks identified in the appendix requires judgment that only faculty members can provide.

Rationale: Broadening the measures of educational goals will build confidence within the university that students are meeting both the overarching and the field-specific goals for education. Comprehensive assessments provide information to faculty members and departments. That information can drive a continual process that improves individual academic programs and the university as a whole.

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Recommendation 5: Diversity of the Learning Environment

Recommendation: *The University of Kansas will be a more diverse learning environment -- including students, faculty and staff – that reflects the changing demographics of the state and nation. KU must be mindful of the value all aspects of diversity bring to the university and its learning environment. This includes geographic, socio-economic, first-generation and language diversity. Achieving this goal will require a partnership with K-12 education, local communities and others to ensure preparedness and develop multiple pathways to a college education. It will also require increased efforts in student recruitment, targeted scholarship funding, and a high degree of first-year and ongoing support. The recruitment of international students will also receive greater attention, along with the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty and staff.*

Background: According to a recent report from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (*Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/ Ethnicity, 1992 to 2022*):

The racial/ethnic composition of Kansas's public high school graduating classes will begin to show more diversification over the coming decade and beyond. [T]he nation as a whole is undergoing sweeping changes in the racial/ethnic composition of its population. In Kansas, as in other states the big changes are the result of rapid growth in the number of Hispanic high school students and graduates, coupled with a shrinking number of White non-Hispanics in the educational pipeline.

The report suggests the number of white high school graduates in Kansas will drop by more than 20% between 2004-05 and 2014-15, while the number of black graduates will drop by more than 26%. At the same time, the number of Hispanic graduates will increase by 39%. These changes are already evident at KU. Programs such as TRIO, Hawk Link, PREP, Bridge and Summer Research Experience help students transition to KU and succeed academically.

International enrollment has declined at KU, in Kansas, and nationwide in recent years. This may reflect such factors as post-9/11 security concerns, U.S. immigration restrictions, the rising cost of enrollment, and KU's higher admissions standards for non-resident applicants.

The recommendation endorses and extends KU's 2004 "Policy on Diversity of the Student Body" http://www.diversity.ku.edu/student_diversity.shtml.

Rationale: As a state-assisted public university, the learning environment at KU must reflect more closely the demographic changes taking place in the state and nation. More than just a matter of equity, it is a question of economic survival for Kansas. The bioscience, aviation, energy, agriculture and professional service sectors that dominate employment in the state require an increasing number of university-educated people. Those sectors will be starved for qualified employees unless KU and other universities attract, retain and graduate an increasingly diverse student body (from Kansas and elsewhere). The diminished enrollment of international students represents a special challenge to graduate programs that rely on this population. It also represents a loss for KU's global perspective and cultural vibrancy. The same is true of KU's faculty and staff. While the university has made progress in the hiring of a more diverse faculty and staff, it continues to reflect the relative lack of diversity in the student body. For KU to recruit a more diverse enrollment, it must have a more diverse faculty/staff.

Appendix: Characteristics and Hallmarks

The **Teaching and Learning Task Force** worked to identify characteristics of successful students and hallmarks of KU graduates. The resulting list reflects a thoughtful conversation and a desire to engage others at KU in this discussion. The intent is to encourage reflection and stimulate action on the part of students, faculty, and the whole KU community. Specifically, it may prompt departments and individual faculty members to address this topic, and may help them align their curriculum and teaching with characteristics and hallmarks of their own.

Candidates for admission to the University of Kansas should exhibit:

- **Active intellectual capacity and curiosity**, reflected in standardized test scores, previous classroom performance, evidence of critical thinking skills, a broad foundation of knowledge, and a passion for learning;
- **Honesty, self-awareness**, and adherence to ethical norms in the face of ambiguity and peer pressure;
- **Leadership ability**, demonstrated by active group involvement, adaptable problem-solving under stress, thoughtful engagement in civic affairs, the ability to form a community, and experience in service learning;
- **Eagerness to learn and share knowledge**, based on personal and professional maturity, goal-setting, a willingness to take responsibility for academic success, and the recognition that learning is the enterprise of a lifetime;
- **Excellent communications skills** (written, verbal, technological) that support the application of knowledge in the campus, workplace, and community;
- **Global awareness and breadth of thinking**, shown by an appreciation for other cultures, openness to new ideas and alternative ways of thinking, curiosity, tolerance, and respect for the opinions of others; and
- **Creativity and understanding** in conducting research, analyzing results, presenting findings, and responding to criticism.

Graduates of the University of Kansas should exhibit greater:

- Capacity and eagerness to engage in **research and creative activity**, and to **learn independently** for a lifetime;
- **Civic engagement**, characterized by community service and involvement;
- **Breadth of knowledge** that is interdisciplinary and integrated, with depth in areas of special interest;
- **Global awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity**, based on personal experience and classroom exposure;
- **Vocational focus**, derived from faculty mentoring, awareness of professional options, and a sense of purpose;
- **Personal and professional maturity and integrity**, and the ability to make and pursue appropriate long-term goals;
- **Communications and interpersonal skills**, rooted in critical thinking, objective analysis, and articulate expression; and

- **Loyalty to KU**, and respect for the purposes of higher education, reflected by an ongoing affinity to the institution.

In order for students to attain the hallmarks of a KU education, the university provides its students with opportunities to:

- Pursue studies of their choice in an atmosphere of **free academic inquiry**;
- Make use of a wide range of student **support services**, regardless of ability;
- Utilize appropriate **academic facilities**, e.g., libraries, other databases, safe classrooms and labs, campus housing, cultural centers, and recreational space;
- Encounter **excellent faculty** whose focus is on teaching and learning;
- Connect academic pursuits with **vocational and service-learning** interests;
- Receive a degree in an appropriate period of **time**, with as small a **financial burden** as possible;
- Conduct **research** and **creative activity** under the critical guidance of **faculty mentors**;
- Experience a **campus community** that reflects the **diversity** of the world around them; and
- **Exceed** their own expectations.