

# Retention and Timely Graduation Task Force Report

## Submitted April 2010

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## I. Executive Summary

Realizing that the US is losing its global preeminence in higher education as the percentage of our population with college degrees declines, education leaders are increasingly concerned with university students staying in school and completing their degrees. At KU,  $\pm 20$  percent of students leave after their first year, only  $\pm 32$  percent graduate in four years, and  $\pm 60$  percent graduate in six years, ranking us below many comparable institutions. Clearly, there is significant room for improvement in the policies, procedures, and conditions contributing to the key indicators of institutional success: student retention and timely graduation. Low performance results in the loss of potential graduates, tuition revenue, and state and federal financial support.

To meet these challenges, Chancellor Gray-Little appointed a Task Force to recommend the best steps to encourage and help our students stay in school and reduce the time it takes to finish their degrees. The Task Force advocates two kinds of change: first and foremost, a fundamental cultural shift in recognizing that students, student support services, faculty, and academic staff share responsibility for enhancing retention and timely graduation. The second kind of change requires strategies to embed shared responsibilities into effective policies and procedures. To achieve such University evolution, the task force generated 10 recommendations each with a series of action plans. The **first five** reflect *fundamental cultural changes*; the **latter five** are *instrumental modifications* that will institutionalize and reinforce the new culture.

### **Recommendations for Fundamental Change**

- 1) Establish university-wide leadership to assume responsibility for promoting awareness of the challenges associated with retention and timely graduation across the campus and to bring about the necessary cultural shift at KU.

*The following four recommendations target ways to offer more engaging educational experiences. Each will result in a significant change in the way KU approaches undergraduate education.*

- 2) Engage students more quickly and actively in the intellectual life of the University. Through a broad reconfiguration of the first year experience, students can immediately begin building networks, learning about career options, and investing in their futures.
- 3) Redesign courses (especially large lecture formats) to promote learner-centered and problem-oriented approaches. If students are more involved with their own learning and learning is relevant to their life goals, they will have a stronger commitment to degree completion.
- 4) Overhaul General Education at KU. Current requirements deviate significantly from those at comparable institutions and present obstacles to timely graduation for many students. Renovating first year experiences for students and using general education to emphasize learner outcomes will help students recognize and define their intellectual and career goals.
- 5) Raise the profile of and increase accessibility to undergraduate research and service learning. Promoting such options through curricular changes and a dedicated undergraduate research office would encourage the creation of research opportunities, facilitate contacts between faculty and student researchers, and increasingly engage the community beyond the campus.

### **Recommendations for Instrumental Change**

- 6) Change policies and adopt enrollment management technology to help students understand course sequences and prerequisites, learn about fields of study, and secure effective advice. Such steps will encourage students to take more responsibility for their own degree progress.
- 7) Invest in support systems to identify struggling students early in their careers and provide effective intervention to those who need help, recognizing that the initial three weeks for first-year students is a critical period to successful adjustment to college responsibilities.
- 8) Revise and integrate university advising systems to develop a more seamless system that will provide support for students across the span of their educational careers (counseling new students, bridging transitions, and encouraging degree mapping).
- 9) Develop strategies for intervention when students face financial problems, including the deployment of strategic scholarships
- 10) Track student learning systematically and develop effective ways to evaluate and document student progress.

## II. Charge and Task Force Work-Plan

The Chancellor charged the Retention and Timely Graduation Task Force with developing recommendations that would result in encouraging students to stay in school and reduce the time it takes them to complete their degrees. Recognizing that this was a huge and complex topic and that no single action will result in the desired outcomes, the Task Force was subdivided into four working groups to study how practices and policies of (1) advising, (2) engaged learning, (3) general education, and (4) intervention may impact student success. Each working group interviewed those individuals at KU responsible for different elements of enhancing retention and graduation, surveyed how other institutions were approaching these difficult issues, reviewed empirical research on practices that promote positive student outcomes, considered what approaches were necessary and appropriate at KU, and developed reports of best practices for implementing their recommendations. Summarizing and synthesizing these reports resulted in 10 Task Force recommendations, each with a series of action plans.

## III. Background, General observations, and the KU Context

Although there is perennial concern about retention and graduation of student in universities, recent studies (e.g., the University Leadership Council report on Hardwiring Student Success) emphasize that these issues have risen to top priorities at most institutions. Helping students stay in school and complete their degrees on time has gained national attention; the Obama administration is directing funds to improve completion rates and a growing number of state governments are shifting allocations to those universities making improvements in retention and graduation. At the same time, universities are discovering that modest improvements in first-year retention rates can translate into millions of dollars over four years.

From the perspective of students, the longer they stay in school, the less likely they are to finish, which means that families are looking more closely at retention and graduation figures as well. When undergraduates add years to their education, they also impact their classmates by clogging the pipeline from admission to graduation, and taking seats that could be occupied by other students.

At KU, the spotlight has been turned on retention and graduation because with only about 80 percent of students staying at the university after their first year, just 32 percent graduating in four years, and a six-year graduation rate of only 60 percent, KU ranks near the bottom of comparable institutions. Other schools whose student profiles match ours have first-year retention rates in the 85-90 percent range, four-year graduation rates closer to 40 percent, and six-year rates above 65 percent.

We can and should make changes that will identify and aid struggling students, that will encourage students to get involved with their education, and that will remove barriers to degree completion. Some improvements can be instituted quickly and easily; others will require modifications of fundamental cultural and curricular elements and will develop over a longer time period. Our recommendations were derived from reviewing studies and considering options that other institutions are using to meet the challenges of improving retention and timely graduation. The changes advocated here have been developed from the perspective of the University of Kansas and are directed at the particular systems and curricula of our institution.

#### IV. Ten recommendations with Action Plans for Improving Retention and Time to Graduation:

*Adopting a multi-level approach that incorporates best practices, builds on the existing framework, and integrates new options. Recommendations are not prioritized, but are ordered such that **the first 5 recommend “fundamental” changes** (transforming the way we approach the basic tasks of faculty and staff at KU as they relate to the undergraduate experience) and **the second 5 recommend “instrumental” changes** (modifying and supporting the fundamental goals and providing a more meaningful and engaging undergraduate experience).*

***Recommendation 1: Develop a university-wide commitment to raise the profile for improving retention and timely graduation, recognizing that this will require changing campus culture***

- A) **Action:** Initiate a retention and graduation office/coordinator/committee responsible for guiding implementation of Task Force recommendations and monitoring outcomes
  - (i) Develop a system to measure success of implementation
- B) **Action:** Charge each Academic and Student Success unit with developing and implementing a plan, based on Task Force recommendations, to enhance retention and promote timely graduation
  - (i) Encourage cultural shift in College and Schools
    - (a) Change focus from identifying failing students to enhancing student success by promoting intellectual engagement and positive student behaviors
    - (b) Expect leadership to educate academic professionals and drive change in perspective
  - (ii) Articulate a link between the responsibilities of academic units and student success (all student services) units for results that boost retention and graduation
  - (iii) Develop a system to monitor and measure effectiveness of changes

***Recommendation 2: Engage students as they enter the University***

- A) **Action:** Identify broad General Academic Areas (replacing Interest Codes) for entering students (e.g., Social Sciences, Humanities, Art and Dance, etc.)
  - (i) General Academic Areas would lead students into specific majors/degree programs
  - (ii) Students would focus interests more naturally and gradually
- B) **Action:** Develop First Year Seminars (*as part of revised General Education requirements*) that establish intellectual engagement and involve students in early discussions of major/program possibilities and demonstrate the value of higher education
  - (i) team-taught by a faculty member and professional advisor
  - (ii) introduce students to intellectual life at the university
  - (iii) address skills required for academic success at the university
  - (iv) enhance social support and students’ sense of community
  - (v) Consider expanding/re-focusing PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar course, especially for students with specific ACT ranges
- C) **Action:** Change social norms around engaged learning and student responsibility
  - (i) Increase student awareness of engaged learning options (embed in First Year Seminars)
  - (ii) Increase “marketing” of engaged learning certificate programs
  - (iii) Promote student understanding of and commitment to engaged learning and student responsibilities (e.g., expectations for coursework outside of class time) with a student contract, completed in First Year Seminars.

***Recommendation 3: Redesign courses to enhance student engagement in learning***

- A) **Action:** Promote course redesigns, especially for key large lecture format entry courses
  - (i) Introduce learner-centered, problem-oriented approach to large lecture sections
  - (ii) Generate small-class opportunities within large–students work in learning teams
- B) **Action:** Develop new instructional roles

- (i) Make more use of undergraduate learning assistants or peer tutors
- (ii) Increase role of graduate students in course design and student support/consultation
- (iii) Hold students accountable for their learning each week
- C) **Action:** Consider modularization of courses
  - (i) Students may pass one module and retake another

***Recommendation 4: Remove obstacles to timely graduation erected by current KU requirements***

- A) **Action:** Reduce graduation requirement from 124 to 120 hours
- B) **Action:** Overhaul General Education requirements
  - (i) KU requires 30-50% more credit hours in General Education than comparable universities (especially those that have renovated their requirements within the past decade)
  - (ii) 18% of KU students applying for degree are deemed ineligible because of unfulfilled General Education requirements
  - (iii) The average transfer student must take 12-15 extra hours because transferred courses do not meet KU's distribution requirements
- C) **Action:** Refocus General Education to promote "Learning Outcomes"
  - (i) Current KU model follows "distribution" or "menu" approach
  - (ii) Learning outcomes approach is prevalent in revised General Education plans at comparable institutions
  - (iii) Students more engaged by achieving learning outcomes
- D) **Action:** Consider making General Education University-wide
  - (i) General Education is currently housed in CLAS
  - (ii) Consider a University Curriculum Committee
  - (iii) Consider University administrator responsible for undergraduate education

***Recommendation 5: Enhance engaged learning options and educationally purposeful activities***

- A) **Action:** Develop an "Engaged Learning Participation Contract"
  - (i) KU undergraduates (freshmen and transfers) commit to completing at least one of the university's Engaged Learning Programs
  - (ii) Contributes to the student's continued enrollment and degree completion
- B) **Action:** Integrate a culture of research into the curriculum
  - (i) Market how and why such a culture distinguishes KU from teaching-centered colleges
  - (ii) Promote core of faculty committed to undergraduate research
  - (iii) Constitute Office of Undergraduate Research
    - (a) Led by a strong advocate within the administration
    - (b) Charged with promoting undergraduate research and how it improves teaching and learning
      - (1) Establish more funding sources for undergraduate research
    - (c) Establish a data base of research projects
    - (d) Match student interests with faculty expertise and opportunities
    - (e) Collaborate with colleagues at other institutions or generate partnerships with the private sector
    - (f) Introduce first year students to research across disciplines by inserting "Modes of Inquiry" or "Research Development" aspects into First Year Seminars
- C) **Action:** Boost student and faculty participation in community-engaged (service) learning
  - (i) Provide course development grants for community-engaged (service) learning
  - (ii) Coordinate better with community partners

(iii) Promote integration of faculty outreach with community involvement in student learning

- D) **Action:** Encourage Capstone Courses to synthesize and apply learning about majors
- (i) Serves as “end point” and “final goal” to major
  - (ii) Establishes target for degree completion

**Recommendation 6: Make policy and technology changes that encourage retention**

- A) **Action:** Address issue of number of course withdrawals allowed and how late students can add
- B) **Action:** Provide a simple, widely accessible method for students to track progress toward a degree
- C) **Action:** Expand use of automatic prerequisite checking for course enrollment to ensure that students have critical knowledge and/or skills necessary to support success
- D) **Action:** Develop more on-line introductions (following PSYC 102 model) to General Academic Areas to help students make better informed decisions
- E) **Action:** Enhance technology for tracking and recording of advising information
- (i) Classroom performance, advising appointment scheduling, four year academic plans, etc
  - (ii) Kyou advising portal should be a central clearinghouse for this information

**Recommendation 7: Intervene early and often**

- A) **Action:** Adopt an early warning system, e.g., *Starfish* or *Signals*
- (i) Include academic progress and class attendance
  - (ii) Encourage and support faculty teaching large entry-level sections to use Blackboard and record student performance during first few weeks of class
- B) **Action:** Begin intervention during initial three weeks of first year students
- C) **Action:** Promote quick and effective assistance for students who need help
- (i) Schedule meetings with advisors
  - (ii) Expand tutoring and academic support
- D) **Action:** Develop system for contacting students who don't enroll in subsequent semesters and for encouraging students who leave in good academic standing to return
- (i) Discover reason(s) for not enrolling and help resolve fixable problems

**Recommendation 8: Develop an “Integrated Advising Model” to convey students across all thresholds (entering KU; adapting to University life; deciding on major field; transitioning to advising in the major; completing major requirements; graduating)**

- A) **Action:** Use University Advising Center to initiate student/advisor relationship
- (i) Involve students in generating realistic plans
- B) **Action:** Restructure current advising staff FTE's and current faculty service commitments to lead Academic Community Teams
- (i) Identify problems and opportunities for more advising intervention
  - (ii) Train and purposefully select faculty advisors/mentors
  - (iii) Develop retention and graduation rate targets for each Academic Community Team
- C) **Action:** Revise advice to students
- (i) Emphasize multi-semester planning
  - (ii) Promote focus on graduation and long-term goals
  - (iii) Follow-up on initial term academic performance
  - (iv) Offer “prescriptive” degree maps, degree map milestones, & “What-if” degree maps
- D) **Action:** Identify problematic points in student careers as indicated by performance data
- (i) Track major and degree exploration
  - (ii) Review Graduation in Four midpoint progress
  - (iii) Monitor and intervene to promote timely declaration of major and/or admission to an academic program
- E) **Action:** Develop decentralized professional advising teams to guide students in majors
- (i) Place professional advisors in departments

- (ii) Select best faculty advisors to meet the needs of majors
- F) **Action:** Develop strong and frequent communication and coordination between professional advising staff and degree programs
  - (i) Provide frequent and meaningful information and feedback to students, staff and faculty about rules, options, performance, and progress toward degree
  - (ii) Provide both group and individual advising options, extending advising contact time

**Recommendation 9: Address financial impediments: balancing school and work**

- A) **Action:** Charge a committee with examining ways to intervene when financial crises arise
  - (i) Consider strategic scholarships
  - (ii) Support development of a Financial Literacy Office to help students make better financial decisions

**Recommendation 10: Systematically track student learning**

- A) **Action:** Measure efficacy of engaged educational practices
  - (i) Use to inform further refinements and enhancements
  - (ii) Make results public to “advertise” the value of a KU degree to potential employers as well as prospective students
- B) **Action:** Promote vertically integrated student e-portfolios
  - (i) Connect to provost’s project on Documenting Learning Success
- C) **Action:** Use AAC&U VALUE rubrics to evaluate student progress on general education goals such as critical thinking and writing

## V. Findings and Documents Supporting Recommendations and Action Plans

### Report of the Opportunities for Intervention Working Group

(Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle [Convener], Stuart Bell, Dongbin Kim,  
Mary Ann Rasnak, and Madison Shipley)

#### Recommendations:

#### 1. Make a University-Wide Commitment to Improving Retention and Graduation Rates

- Require each Academic and Student Success Unit to develop and implement a retention and graduation plan based on university recommendations. Fully involve faculty members in planning and implementation.
- Develop a retention office/coordinator/committee responsible for guiding recommendation implementation.
- Include an implementation timeline
- Develop a system to measure success of recommendations
- Recognize this will take a culture change and consciousness-raising. Our peer institutions have done this—no reason KU cannot.

#### 2. Adopt an Early Warning System

- Include academic progress and class attendance.
- Provide course feedback to students early in the semester.
- Pilot with selected faculty/departments/courses as soon as feasible.
- Develop a combination of in-person and virtual responses to students alerted based on severity of problem.
- Consider Starfish or Signals systems.
  - Sample of institutions that use early warning or mid-terms grade systems: Georgia Tech, Iowa State, Michigan State, Penn State, Purdue, Universities of Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Texas A&M.

#### 3. Expand Tutoring and Academic Support

- What if all KU students had tutoring like a KU student athlete?
- Increase resources for tutoring and department/discipline help rooms. Focus on courses that contribute most to poor retention.
- Consider a proactive approach to tutoring that engages at-risk students at the beginning of the semester and provides a range of tutoring options that encourages all students to make a commitment to academic success.
- Develop a coalition of all academic support programs; create a central website.
- Consider developing a Learning Center that incorporates support for various courses.
- Consider developing online study skills courses.

#### 4. Expand and Target First Year Seminars

- What if all KU students had a first year seminar like an Honors Program student?
- Consider expansion/re-focusing of PRE 101 – Orientation Seminar course especially for students with specific ACT ranges
  - Add sections that start a little later in the semester



- Consider developing online academic transition courses and introduction to the major/declaration of major course (use PSYC 102 as a model).
- Beyond PRE 101, offer a range of first year seminars from Freshman Interest Groups (FIGS) to introduction to major seminars, academic seminars that focus on critical thinking and writing skills, and academic seminars with specific disciplinary or interdisciplinary content.

#### **5. Provide More Contact with First and Second Year Students**

- What if all KU students had academic support and integration to the academic program like an Engineering student?
- It is vital that some intervention happen by the **third week**.
- Consider re-establishing early calls/contacts with all new students utilizing staff and student staff from various departments. Ensure that students have a connection with someone who cares about their academic success.
- Develop system for contacting students who don't enroll in subsequent semesters and for encouraging withdrawn students to be readmitted (this could be expanded beyond the first and second year; consider seniors who could/should be graduating.)
  - Example from *Graduate in Four Report*: Contact students who enroll in less than 15 hours in fall or 30 hours by end of spring semester and encourage them to take summer classes.
- Address issue of 8% of students who leave in good standing.
- Consider approaches/requirements/technologies that elicit active student involvement and commitment to persistence and graduation.

#### **6. Make Policy and Technology Changes that Encourage Persistence and Retention**

- Address issue of number of course withdrawals allowed and how late students can add, especially for students on probation. Students have three weeks to cancel a course (not reflected on transcript) and four weeks to withdraw and still get 50% refund—much more extended than most institutions.
- Provide a simple, widely accessible method for students to track progress toward a degree.
  - Example from *Graduate in Four Report*.
  - New Advising Module in Enroll and Pay offers some hope for this—implementation is two years away.
- Fully implement prerequisites – have done this for math and starting with English courses next.
  - Incorporate satisfactory academic progress requirements for freshmen and sophomores. (Use Financial Aid and NCAA Student Athlete requirements as a guide.) Could incorporate enforcement of early and continuous English and math enrollment with this.

#### **7. Address financial impediments: balancing school and work**

- Designate a group to examine ways to intervene when financial crises arise
- Consider strategic scholarships, especially in light of Scholarship Consultant report and recommendations from the Office of Student Financial Aid on utilization of university grant funds.
- Support the development of a Financial Literacy Office to help students make better financial decisions.

Institutions with similar SAT/ACT of entering classes and higher retention and graduation rates:

	1 <sup>st</sup> year Retention Rate	4-year Grad. Rate	6-Year Grad. Rate
○ University of Colorado	84.0%	40.7%	66.5%
○ Indiana University	90.4%	49.0%	72.4%
○ Iowa State University	83.5%	33.5%	67.4%
○ Michigan State University	91.7%	49.7%	77.1%
○ University of Missouri	85.2%	43.0%	68.9%
○ University of Oregon	83.7%	44.5%	66.6%
○ University of Utah	85%	20.8%	56%
○ University of Kansas	79.7%	32.0%	59.6%

## 1. Summary of Intervention Group activities and findings:

- Guest interviews:
  - Cindy Derritt, University Registrar and Marl Herron, Associate Registrar
    - Starfish Early Alert and Connect systems
    - Withdrawal information – beyond “other” biggest categories are medical, employment, and financial reasons. Consider interventions with students who withdraw.
  - Paul Buskirk, Student Athlete Support Services
    - Academic counseling + tutoring
    - Preemptive – they don’t wait for failure to occur
    - Weekly meetings with academic counselors
    - One-on-one tutoring
    - \$\$\$ - Spend over \$800 per student for tutoring as compared to university average of \$7 per freshman
  - Brenda Maiggard and other Office of Student Financial Aid staff
    - Satisfactory academic progress a federal requirement for students who receive financial aid—requires 2.0 gpa and completing 75% of cumulative attempted hours (as enrolled the first day of class). For example, if you have attempted 60 hours, you must have completed at least 45 hours with a 2.0 gpa
    - Can’t lose eligibility until the end of the second year; about 6% lose eligibility each year.
    - They find students aren’t realistic about completion and need intervention related to choice of major and loan indebtedness.
- Individual interviews
  - Tammara Durham, University Advising Center
    - Concerned about UAC advisors ability to handle all referrals from Starfish. Suggests a triage system where severe cases go to UAC.
    - Have students develop 4-year plans and if they deviate, triggers visit to advisor
    - Recommends some PRE 101 sections start a little later in the semester as students become aware of demands.
    - Supports enforcing early and continuous English and math enrollment, but perhaps extend beyond first year to 45 hours.
    - Recommends most entering freshmen take PRE 101 and students on probation should take LA&S 292.
    - Thinks initial focus should be regular semester, not summer bridge programs. Her dissertation research found that most students

think they are prepared and don't need special help in advance. Reality sets in once they are here. Having a connection with someone was the key to their success once that happened.

- Kim McNeley, CLAS Student Academic Services
  - For follow-up with students, consider self-help emails
  - Attendance is taken routinely in freshman math and English courses now—could expand this.
  - CUSA proposal to not allow students on probation to add courses late
  - Consider groupings of students with an advisor, academic interest, and resources
  - Consider a “declaration of major” course—could be online format. Use Psyc 102 as an example.
  - CLAS is considering issue of satisfactory academic progress and limiting the number of withdrawals
  - Require students to develop a 2-year plan to graduation once they have declared a major.
  - Fully implement prerequisites – has done this for math and going to English next.
- Reports from working group members:
  - Deb Teeter – OIRP reports and statistics
  - Mary Ann Rasnak – Tutoring Services; PRE 101; Early warning or mid-terms grade systems at other institutions: Georgia Tech, Iowa State, Penn State, Purdue, Universities of Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Texas A&M.
  - Mary Ann provided a report “PRE 101: A Snapshot of its Affects on Retention and Graduation.” Key findings of the OIRP study:
    - The retention rates for the group of students enrolled in PRE 101 are higher than for the matched group of those not enrolled. They are statistically significantly higher for 14 of the 15 years. The rates for students enrolled in PRE 101 are also higher than the average for the overall freshman classes for 14 of the last 15 years, ranging from 79.4% in 1994 to a high of 87.8 % in 2002.
    - The four, five, and six-year graduation rates for enrolled students have been generally equal to or higher than the University’s overall graduation rates. Even more important, as the OIRP report states: “in *all instances* (emphasis added) the graduation rates for the students enrolled in PRE 101 as compared to the matched group were higher.”
    - JoAnn Williams noted in the OIRP report that “With two exceptions, students with ACT/Converted SAT scores of 22 or 23 or show a substantially higher graduation rate (ranging from 55% to 81%) than the overall population.”
- Review of best practices from other institutions with similar SATs of entering classes and higher retention and graduation rates:
  - University of Colorado
  - Indiana University
  - Iowa State University
  - Michigan State University
  - University of Missouri
  - University of Oregon
  - University of Utah

- Summary of findings on these institutions:
  - More academic support and more layers of support:
    - More help rooms—beyond math and writing, chemistry, physics, economics, foreign languages
    - Better coordination of academic support through learning centers, websites, online tutorials and classes
  - Greater variety of tutoring options, including supplemental instruction
  - Greater variety of first year seminars – transition + FIGS + introduction to major seminars
  - All have Learning Communities
  - Three of seven have mid-term grades
  - Most have a Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education or similar position
  - Most have an office or campus-wide committee that focuses on retention
- 2. KU Best Practices – We could impact retention and graduation by offering:
  - Tutoring like a student athlete (Student Athlete Support Services)
  - Freshman seminars like a Honors Program student
  - Freshman academic support and scholarship support like an Engineering student
- 3. What can we learn from the Graduate in Four report?
  - Challenges with the cultural context and student behavior are stressed in the report.
  - Between 20-30% of students fail to successfully completed freshman math courses.
  - Policy issues – students have three weeks to cancel a course (not reflected on transcript) and four weeks to withdraw and still get 50% refund—much more extended than most institutions.
  - Recommendations not completed that should be considered:
    - Contacting students who enroll in less than 15 hours in fall or 30 hours by end of spring semester and encourage them to take summer classes
    - Providing a simple, widely accessible method for students to track progress toward a degree.
    - Enforcing the policy of continuous enrollment in math/English

## Report of the Engaged Learning Working Group

(Andrea Greenhoot [Convener], Yoonmi Nam, Fred Rodriguez, and Marlesa Roney)

### I. Overview

The major goal of the retention and graduation task force is to identify practices that enhance retention and timely completion while maintaining the quality of undergraduate education. The research of the engaged learning working group suggests that efforts to enhance student engagement can move us beyond this goal: **educational practices that intellectually engage students can increase retention and completion rates while simultaneously increasing the quality of the education we provide.** We have identified several empirically-supported strategies and educational practices that are known to increase students' intellectual engagement and promote student learning, continued enrollment, and timely graduation. In the sections below, we list five recommendations that, based on our research, have a high probability of increasing student engagement and learning and improving KU's retention and timely completion rates.

### II. Five Recommendations for Increasing Student Engagement

**Recommendation 1: Develop First-Year Seminars.** Introduce 3-hour first-year seminar courses that introduce students to university life, embedded in a stimulating, focused content area.

*A. Best Practices: The first-year seminar should:*

- Be taught by a faculty member, in a content area of interest to the faculty member
- Introduce students to intellectual life at the university (e.g., awaken intellectual "passions" and help students find a focus).
- Include a curricular component that engages the student with the university and/or community, such as civic engagement, field trips, or research (supported by a small instructional support fund).
- Partner the faculty member with advising staff for course design and delivery
- Address skills required for academic success at the university, including writing, information literacy, critical thinking, and time management (part advising, part general education)
- Enhance social support and students' sense of community, by creating connections with a faculty member and with peers in course.
- Be offered in the fall semester for maximum impact
- Be designed either for freshmen (most) or transfer students (smaller number)

*B. Promote Department and Faculty Investment in the First-Year Seminar.*

- Faculty and departmental participation will be key
- Faculty lines to departments (e.g., UNC offered departments one faculty line for every four seminars developed)
- Teaching release or course banks for course development
- Course development grants

**Recommendation 2: Promote Large-Scale Course Redesigns.** Promote large-scale course redesigns to enhance student engagement, particularly in large-enrollment, introductory courses or other courses that are taken early in the curriculum.

*A. Best Practices: Successful engaged-learning course redesigns should:*

- Introduce learner-centered, problem-oriented approach to large lecture sections
- Create small within large- students work in learning teams (with rotated membership over the semester to promote diversity of thought)
- Support critical thinking and writing skills
- Create new instructional roles, for the faculty member and support staff
  - Consider undergraduate learning assistants or peer tutors

- Increase role of graduate students in course design and student support/consultation.
- Hold students accountable for learning each week to ensure preparation for in-class inquiry (weekly reading quizzes, low stakes assignments)
- Consider modularization of pre-requisite or critical general-education courses-students may pass one module and retake another.

#### *B. Promote Faculty Investment*

- Faculty lines
- Instructional support lines (e.g., graduate student lines to serve as part of instruction team, as consultants- writing center model- or full GTAs)
- Course development grants
- Teaching release or “course banks” for course development
- Redesign classroom spaces to support new course structures
- Support, guidance for redesigns could be facilitated by Center for Teaching Excellence

### **Recommendation 3: Promote Student Engagement in Educationally-Purposeful Activities.**

We focus on the two forms of educationally-purposeful activities that have been shown to enhance retention and that have already gained some traction at KU: research and community-engaged learning.

#### *A. Integrate a culture of undergraduate research into the university*

- Establish an Office of Undergraduate Research
  - Raise profile of undergraduate research, and Research Experience Program, on campus
  - Central clearinghouse of information for students and faculty, including a database of research projects
- Promote on campus in terms of how it improves teaching and learning
- Freshman Research Seminar (research-focused versions of First-Year Seminars), team-taught, introduce students to research in many disciplines
- Increase funding sources for undergraduate research- Travel Awards for conferences
- Collaborations with colleagues at other institutions or partnerships with private sector
- Encourage, reward, recognize faculty involvement in ways that simultaneously increase intellectual value of undergraduate research experience (e.g., active research laboratory as a course)

#### *B. Boost student and faculty participation in community-engaged learning*

- Many of the Best Practices have already been adopted by Center for Service Learning
- Emphasize as opportunity to **translate** academic work into real-world settings- connect with recent emphasis on translational research at KU and national level
- Community-engaged learning should be part of a menu of choices, not requirement
- Develop a match-making center to help students link to service learning opportunities
- Reward, recognize faculty efforts (e.g., faculty grant to develop/enhance service learning courses)
- Assist faculty in maintaining relationship with external agency/community partners

**Recommendation 4: Systematically Track Student Learning and Engagement.** The development and use of assessment tools for tracking student learning and student engagement will be central to the sustainability and long-term success of an engaged learning initiative.

#### *A. Close the Loop*

- Examine impact of engaged learning practices on the student outcomes
- Guide and inform further refinements and enhancements

*B. Make Results Public*

- Advertise value of KU degree to potential employers, students
- Changes to general education requirements will need to be accompanied by documentation that the quality of KU education is maintained or increased
- Help shift social norms at KU to promote a culture of engaged learning

*C. Identify and Develop Tools for Systematic Evaluation*

- Vertically integrated student e-portfolios (begin in first-year seminar), mined for evidence on different curricular levels
- Connect with Provost's project on Documenting Learning Success within majors (department-specific measures for evaluating student learning and tracking student success are already being developed)
- Use AAC&U VALUE rubrics to evaluate student progress on general education goals such as critical thinking and writing

**Recommendation 5: Create a Culture of Student and Faculty Commitment to Engaged Learning at KU.***A. Change culture and social norms around intellectual engagement and student and faculty responsibility*

- Enhance marketing of engaged learning opportunities.
- Enhance marketing of certificate programs
- Communicate role of faculty in engaging students, and the rewards for doing so

*B. Develop Engaged Learning Contract*

- Students commit to an engaged learning program (e.g., Global Awareness, Service Learning, Undergraduate Research, Honors Program, Leadership Minor)
- Use to customize advising of student
- Could be completed in context of First-Year Seminar
- Promote student understanding of and commitment to university student responsibilities (e.g., expectations for coursework outside of class time, academic misconduct)

**III. Supporting Materials: Evidence and Current Practices.****A. Student engagement is positively related to retention and timely graduation.**

The Engaged Learning Working Group reviewed analyses involving the widely-used National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data as well as more focused investigations of specific, high quality educational practices at universities around the US. This review yielded considerable evidence that student engagement in learning and educationally purposeful activities is positively associated with retention and graduation rates. Student reports of their engagement in educationally purposeful activities, as measured by the NSSE, have been consistently linked to a number of positive educational outcomes, including higher rates of retention and completion, even when background variables (e.g., family income, high school GPA) are accounted for (e.g., Kuh et al., 2007). High levels of student engagement appear to be especially beneficial to minority and other historically underserved students, essentially canceling out their typically higher risk of drop out.

Some of our recommendations focus on enhancing student engagement within courses, whereas others promote student engagement in other educationally purposeful activities (e.g., undergraduate research, community-engaged learning). This distinction is an important one, because practices that promote engagement within courses are accessible to all students, whereas educationally purposeful activities such as research and community-engaged learning may be more accessible to some students than to others, depending on factors such as financial resources, family

configuration, and time constraints. Thus, initiatives to enhance engagement within courses are likely to have the broadest impact on student persistence and student learning.

### **B. First year seminars enhance retention and student learning.**

The first-year seminar is designed to introduce students to university life, embedded in a stimulating, focused content area. KU currently offers multiple sections of a small, 2-credit university orientation seminar (PRE 101). This course has been shown to be effective in improving some educational outcomes for students, but it is taken by a small proportion of first-year students and few if any sections are taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty. We propose to expand the impact of the university orientation course by embedding this material into first-year seminars (freshman seminars and a smaller number of first-year seminars for transfer students) that are taught by faculty, perhaps partnered with advising staff, with the goals of inspiring students' intellectual life, orienting them to university life, connecting them with a faculty member, and creating social bonds among students.

Most content-based first year seminars appear to be intellectually valuable at face value, but there is also considerable empirical evidence that the freshman seminar is effective in enhancing student learning and retention rates and timely graduation. Efforts to enhance the first year experience in higher education have been ongoing for several decades. Indeed, The National Resource Center for the First Year Experience (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/>), which organizes an annual international conference and serves as a clearinghouse of information focused on enhancing the first-year college experience, is now over two decades old. The freshman seminar is a key component to most first-year initiatives, although the characteristics of these seminars vary from institution to institution (e.g., whether it is a 1-credit university orientation course versus a 3-credit subject-oriented course). Numerous evaluations of the educational outcomes associated with these first year seminars have shown that compared to students who do not take these courses, those who elect to take a freshman seminar are more likely to persist and graduate and have higher later GPAs, even when background variables are accounted for (see Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005 for a review; see also <http://www.sc.edu/fye/>). Several more controlled empirical evaluations (e.g., involving a matched control group or random assignment to the freshman seminar versus control group) provide even more compelling evidence that these seminars can increase retention, particularly for minority and other historically underserved students (Fidler & Moore, 1996; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Schnell & Dotkott, 2002-2003). It should be noted that a few such investigations have failed to link freshman seminars to enhanced retention rates (e.g., Potts et al., 2003-2004; Hendel et al., 2006-2007), but some of these (e.g., Jamelske, 2008) found that faculty adherence to the academic and curricular goals of the freshman seminar was a key determinant of the success of the program.

### **C. Student- and problem-centered course redesigns enhance retention, progress toward graduation, and student learning.**

There is an extensive literature on undergraduate teaching and learning that suggests that course redesigns that create student-centered, problem-centered approaches enhance learning and positive educational outcomes. In particular, redesigns that move students from a passive, note-taking role to an active, learning orientation, appear to be quite effective in enhancing student engagement, student learning, and retention and completion outcomes. One particularly notable example is the SCALE-UP model developed by Biechner and Saul (2003) in the context of North Carolina State University's large introductory physics courses. These investigators developed a studio-style course "highly collaborative, hands-on, computer-rich, interactive learning environment" for a large-enrollment course that had previously been a "barrier" course in the science curriculum at NCSU. Comparisons of learning and academic outcomes on over 16,000 students from a 5-year period revealed that the course transformation improved grades and attendance relative to a traditional physics section, but more importantly it produced dramatically



greater gains in student understanding and pass rates, particularly among women and minority students. The SCALE-UP model has been adopted successfully by a number of other institutions in a variety of disciplines.

Similar forms of course redesign have been promoted by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) : <http://www.thencat.org/> and these initiatives have also yielded positive outcomes in terms of retention and timely graduation. NCAT has supported and documented 30 such projects at 30 different institutions. Almost all have resulted in demonstrations of improved student learning and engagement, and several have also yield evidence of positive effects on retention.

#### **D. Undergraduate research increases student engagement and positive graduation outcomes.**

The establishment of an office of undergraduate research would raise the profile of undergraduate research on campus and serve as a central clearinghouse for information for students and faculty on undergraduate research opportunities. Currently, information about undergraduate research is widely (and unevenly) distributed; some information can be obtained through the honors program, some through the Research Experience Program (REP), which provides certification for undergraduate research, and some through individual departments. It is currently not known how many undergraduate students receive research training, but in during 07-08 academic year, 196 students received the REP certificate, 57 students received Undergraduate Research Awards (UGRAs; Spring and Summer), and 78 students participated in the Undergraduate Research Symposium. According to all of these measures, Undergraduate research involvement increased during the 08-09 academic year, with 236 students receiving the REP certificate, 102 students receiving UGRAs (Spring and Summer), and 115 students participating in the Undergraduate Research Symposium. Students from the natural sciences represent the largest group receiving UGRAs and participating in the Undergraduate Research Symposium, followed by students in the social sciences and humanities. Interestingly, however, students in the natural sciences are less likely to receive the REP certificate than students in the humanities or in the social sciences.

A number of major research universities have offices of undergraduate research that have been successful in increasing both student and faculty involvement in undergraduate research (e.g., University of North Carolina). There is some evidence that undergraduate involvement in research predicts more positive graduation outcomes even while accounting for pre-existing differences in student characteristics or academic preparation (Barlow & Villarejo, 2004). We looked at the office of undergraduate research at the University of North Carolina as a model. Institutions with high undergraduate research involve cite the need to integrate a culture of research into the curriculum as most important challenge. Other challenges include budgetary issues and political realities: (e.g., Faculty workloads, low student-to-faculty ratios involved in undergraduate research), and facilities. Undergraduate research depends on a core of faculty who are committed to it. Faculty at institutions with high undergraduate involvement in research cite the following as critical components:

- A core of faculty committed to undergraduate research
- A strong advocate within the administration
- Collaborations with colleagues at other institutions/or partnerships with the private sector.
- Good assessment tools – to measure educational benefits.

#### **E. Community-Engaged learning is positively related to retention and other positive educational outcomes.**

Studies report that participation in community-engaged learning, such as service learning experiences, during college is positively associated with students' satisfaction with the college and their intention to continue at the university. Community-engaged learning provides students with opportunities to apply in the real world their academic skills and knowledge and to explore possible career paths. Such learning experiences have been shown to yield numerous benefits to the students, including:

- Increased **Retention**
- Increased interpersonal skills and tolerance/support for diversity
- Increased academic engagement
- Build self-esteem and responsibility
- Increased direct contact with the faculty
- Cultivation of life-long civic engagement

Importantly, faculty also report significant benefits, including an expanded role in class and opportunities to enhance and augment learning material with real-life experience. Community engaged learning also helps build a lasting relationship between the university and the community, increases community access to university resources (facilities, expertise, programs), and enhances university public relations, student recruitment, alumni relations and fund-raising. There is some evidence, however, that mandatory community service or service learning produces negative outcomes for students; therefore, community-engaged learning should be an option not a requirement.

KU's Center for Service Learning opened in 2005 to promote and support service learning courses. Faculty resources (including example syllabi, faculty FAQ and faculty testimonials) are provided on the center's website. The center offers a Certification in Service Learning, which appears on student's transcript. There are three certification process options. Their program also includes Service Learning Ambassadors (SLAMS), which consist of KU students who are responsible for outreach and publicity.

- There were 87 Service Learning course sections in Fall 2009
- There were 45 Service Learning course sections in Spring 2010
- In 2008-2009, 261 students earned certification.
- 90 community partners as of early 2010

Increased faculty involvement in designing and implementing courses with a community-engaged learning component may be promoted by course development grants or temporary course releases. A match-making center to help students link to service learning opportunities

#### **F. Efforts to track student learning at KU are underway.**

*E-Portfolios.* Evaluations of student learning and engagement can be used to inform further refinements and enhancements and to generate evidence on KU student learning that can and should be made public. It will be especially important that any changes to the general education curriculum at KU be accompanied by an assessment of the impact of such changes on student learning, to validate that KU is maintaining (or increasing) the quality of the education delivered while improving retention and completion outcomes. Evaluations of student learning are already taking place in 30 departments across the university, as part of the provost's Documenting Learning Success Project. These 30 departments are developing their own measures to evaluate and track the learning outcomes of their students, and 18 of these departments are focusing on undergraduate student learning. Several of these departments are using e-portfolio software to collect and keep track of student work that can be later "mined" for evidence of learning. A university-wide system of vertically-integrated portfolios could create a database of student work that could be mined at multiple levels of analysis- to evaluate student progress towards the goals of both their major and general education at KU.

*AAC&U VALUE Rubrics.* Coordinated by the AAC&U, a committee of faculty and university professionals spent 18 months developing rubrics for evaluating 15 essential learning outcomes (e.g., critical thinking, written communication, oral communication) in undergraduate education. A subset of these rubrics have been used by a team of faculty and graduate students, organized by Dan Bernstein of the Center for Teaching Excellence, to evaluate the work of 100 students in Psychology and Political Science courses as part of a research project on the teaching of critical thinking and writing at KU. The results of this project (Bernstein & Greenhoot, 2010) showed that scores on the VALUE rubrics were closely related to the course instructors' own assessments of the same work, suggesting that they are measuring valid learning outcomes that connect well with faculty expectations for their students. Further pilot work using the VALUE rubrics will be conducted in the Spring of 2010, spearheaded by Deb Teeter and the Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

### **G. A pilot study of an Engaged Learning Participation Contract is underway.**

A substantial body of research shows that formal "commitments" to one's intentions increase the likelihood of follow-through. An engaged learning contract would ask students to make such a commitment, with the expectation that it would increase their awareness of engaged learning opportunities at KU, as well as increase the likelihood of continued involvement in such opportunities. Marlesa Roney and the office of the Vice Provost for Student Success are piloting an engaged learning participation contract program in Spring 2010.

#### **DRAFT: University of Kansas Engaged Learning Participation Contract**

**Purpose:** KU's Engaged Learning Participation Contract is designed to increase each student's level of engaged involvement in the University, thus contributing to the student's commitment to continued enrollment and degree completion.

**Who:** All new undergraduates (freshmen and transfer)

**What:** Completion of at least one of the University's Engaged Learning Programs:

1. Global Awareness Program
2. Service Learning
3. Undergraduate Research
4. Honors Program
5. Study Abroad
6. Leadership Minor
7. [others as identified by the Task Force]

**When:** Immediately following admission to the University of Kansas, new undergraduates will write an essay describing their plans for being an engaged learner at the University, including identification of one-to-three specific potential Engaged Learning Programs. The student will not be limited to these initial areas. The essay information will be used to customize continued recruitment of the student.

During the course of their first semester of enrollment at KU, new undergraduates will declare their specific Engaged Learning Program(s). An enrollment hold will be placed on the records of students who do not comply, thus restricting continued enrollment for the future (e.g., for fall beginners, the hold will be in effect for the following fall semester). Satisfactory progress must be documented annually by the administrator of the Engaged Learning Program using the University's portfolio software.

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### Report of the Advising Working Group

(Kim McNeley [Convener], Ashley Anguiano, Ruben Flores, Bruce Frey, and Toni Johnson)

Three broad goals regarding critical improvements to the advising process were identified:

- A. Develop recommendations that focus on identified problems and opportunities for more advising intervention.**
- B. Integrate the advising process through trained and purposefully selected faculty advisors/mentors and strong and frequent communication/coordination between professional advising staff and programs.**
- C. Provide frequent and meaningful information and feedback to students, staff and faculty about rules, options, performance, and progress toward degree.**

Details of the specific actions recommended are included in this document. These conclusions were formed through the following process:

#### I. Review of Literature

The quality or frequency of undergraduate academic advising is often found to be related to retention, and the relationship is generally found to be indirect. For instance, good advising is correlated with higher GPA or higher student satisfaction and those variables predict retention and intention to stay in college. Many studies fail to find evidence of a relationship between quality or frequency of advising and retention. Evidence of the effects of good advising is often methodologically difficult to isolate because several variables account for retention much more strongly than advising and many of those are demographic (e.g., age, gender) or environmental (e.g., family, employment) and beyond the control of an advising system. Among the variables that good advising is associated with, beyond GPA and student satisfaction with school, are perception of importance of completion and the value of a degree for future employment.

The strength and quality of the personal relationship between students and an advisor may be important for retention. Astin's theory of college satisfaction includes the assumption that the level and quality of interaction with faculty and staff affects perceived connections with the institution. Focused advising can clarify students' academic and career goals and the level of clarity in those goals is related to retention. Some studies have found that *the* two critical factors in students' decision to remain enrolled until completion are initial and extended orientation and advisement programs and a positive connection with college personnel in their first semester.

A comprehensive review of institutional suggestions about retention was published by *ACT* in 2004. Among the practices identified as most important for retention are first year advising programs, dedicated advising centers and, most importantly, advising programs *targeted* at selected student populations identified at the particular institution as at-risk.

- A. Review of recommendations from the Academic Advising Assessment report (completed report 1 August 2008). The following target retention and graduation rate improvement:
  1. Establish a permanent Academic Advising Leadership Team to coordinate advising efforts University-wide. This team has been established, meeting on a monthly basis, reporting as required to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.
  2. Deploy and encourage use of the Online Advising Tool. Key components of this tool have been developed, but several additional components are required. Student use of this tool is not consistent; further education and reinforcement is necessary to bring the tool to full potential.

3. Expand Advising Specialist Model (from CLAS) to 1) facilitate student transitions into the academic unit and 2) provide support to faculty advisors to improve consistent advising information delivery. The Advising Specialist Model has not been expanded due to budgetary constraints.
  4. Establish Student Advisory Team for student input. College and professional school advisory boards have been established.
  5. Develop better mechanisms of transition from UAC to majors advising. UAC has requested additional staff; however, budget constraints have prevented this action. The College has implemented stronger communication regarding milestone completion and modified the use of enrollment holds to indicate clearly when critical actions/decisions are required by students.
- B. Review of Advising Models at Top 5 Comparison Institutions (attached).
- C. Discussion with Advising Leadership Team, 16 December, provided the following insights:
1. Academic warnings are valuable, especially during 1<sup>st</sup> three weeks of initial enrollment, but they are not accessible to advising staff in a timely manner. Attendance reports would be highly beneficial.
  2. The advising system focus should be on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years.
  3. Enhancements to current Kyou advising portal, “Advising Clearinghouse” website, is needed – one place to access advising resources. All KU advisors should have appropriate access and utilize this central system.
  4. Schools or majors with selective requirements should track students prior to admission and coordinate efforts with current UAC and CLAS.
  5. Better rewards are needed for effective faculty advisors to promote faculty mentoring. However, concerns were voiced regarding the likelihood that increases in advising errors may occur as faculty take on more responsibility in the process. Clear focus on mentoring should be considered.
- II. Determine problematic points in student careers as indicated by performance data where enhanced advising efforts may have a positive impact. The following points were determined:
- A. **Early major and degree exploration tracking.** 75% of students change majors, 60% are pursuing more than one major, and 35% of students in the College are required to have two areas (major, co-major, or minor) of study. At admission, students are required to enter a single area of interest. Interest codes and their relationship to majors are confusing – students should have broader categories to indicate initial interest and facilitate the exploration of options and our understanding of their progress.
  - B. **Initial term academic performance.** 24% of students are placed on academic probation as a result of poor academic performance in their initial term.
  - C. **Graduation-in-Four midpoint progress review.** 16% of tuition compact (Fall 2007) students are “on schedule” having completed 62 of 124 minimum hours for graduation and declared a major or gained admission to a competitive program.
  - D. **Timely declaration/admission into an academic program.** 55% of juniors have not declared a major, despite the 60 hours policy.

### Advising Working Group Recommendations/Action Steps

The following recommendations are proposed:

- I. Develop/implement an Integrated Advising Model, “I AM”, thereby providing continuity of advising support for students from the admission process through graduation. This model would concentrate

efforts at critical points in student careers where performance data has proven that progress is problematic.

- A. To provide Year 1 & 2 seminar series, in Academic Interest Communities, for faculty mentors and advisors to engage students in earlier discussions of major/program possibilities and the value of higher education.
  - B. To maintain concept of the University Advising Center to provide students an opportunity to develop key relationships with a professional advisor to gain support regarding life skills coaching, University policy and procedures, and key advising milestones/learning outcomes (attached).
  - C. To deliver advising through a combination of both group and individual contacts, extending currently available contact time.
- II. Restructure current advising staff FTE’s and current faculty service commitments to lead Academic Community Teams, optimally within the academic units granting the degree. Promote dual assignment and location of advisors with office hours in UAC and in departments providing a smoother transition to students and support for faculty mentors, thereby improving consistency of advising information.
- III. Revise current Interest Code designations and Year 1 & 2 degree audit tracking to facilitate students’ purposeful, informed, and timely exploration of academic major or program choice from the admissions process through declaration/admission into an academic program. Academic Interest codes would begin broadly (i.e., Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Languages and Culture, Art and Dance, Humanities, Pre-professional) and progress to specific majors/degree programs.
- IV. Further develop technology for tracking and recording of advising information from a variety of sources (classroom performance, advising appointment availability and scheduling, four year academic plans, etc.). The current development of the Kyou advising portal should be a central clearinghouse for this information.
- V. Develop retention and graduation rate targets for each Academic Community Team with annual evaluation of performance improvements.

The recommendations above would provide for delivery of the Year 1 to 4 advising model/program on the following page.

Year 1 to 4 Advising Model/Program		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Group Advising-Seminar Series</b> Facilitated by Advising Teams made up of Staff Advisors (SA), Faculty Mentors (FM), and University services staff as needed. Possible Discussion Topics:	<b>Individual Advising</b> Provided by combined team of professional advising staff.  Primarily Delivered By:
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University Resources (SA),</li> <li>• Study Skills (AAAC or SA),</li> <li>• Expectations of Participation in an Academic Community (Academic Misconduct) (CLAS),</li> <li>• Value of Higher Education and</li> </ul>	Professional Staff - office hours in central University Advising Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication of general education requirements</li> <li>• Development of plans (4 semesters) for degree</li> </ul>

	<p>General Education (FM or Career Services)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Breadth of University Offerings (FM)</li> <li>• Selection of One Academic Community to Explore (SA &amp; FM)</li> </ul>	<p>exploration/admission (SA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment advising</li> <li>• Probation advising</li> <li>• Follow up on academic warnings (attendance in first three weeks and performance)</li> </ul> <p>Faculty Mentor – assigned limited individual advising</p>
<p>Year 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Interest Community Seminar – Narrowing the focus to 3 potential areas of study</li> <li>• Development of online exploration mini-courses in each department (Psych 102 Model) (FM).</li> <li>• Student Engagement Certification (SA or FM)</li> </ul>	<p>Professional Staff - located in Academic Interest Area (i.e., Social Sciences in Fraser Hall)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation English &amp; math completion</li> <li>• Narrowing of major selection</li> <li>• Probation advising</li> <li>• Follow up on academic warnings (attendance in first three weeks and performance)</li> </ul> <p>Faculty Mentor – assigned to declared students</p>
<p>Year 3</p>		<p>Professional Staff – housed in academic department (i.e., Psychology in Fraser Hall)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of General Education requirements</li> <li>• Two Year Plan to Graduation for major(s)</li> <li>• Probation advising</li> <li>• Plan B advising</li> </ul> <p>Faculty Mentor – assigned to declared students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elective choices</li> <li>• Internship/capstone planning</li> <li>• Research/service with discipline</li> <li>• Graduate school options</li> </ul>
<p>Year 4 to graduation</p>	<p>Planning graduation (SA &amp; Graduation Advisors) LA&amp;S Job Search Strategies (Career Services &amp; FM)</p>	<p>Professional Staff – housed in academic department (i.e., Psychology in Fraser Hall)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree audits</li> <li>• Probation advising</li> </ul> <p>Faculty Mentor – assigned to declared students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career planning/references</li> <li>• Certification of final major requirements</li> </ul>



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**Report of the General Education Working Group**  
(Barbara Romzek [Convener], Ann Brill, Laura Mielke, and Jack Porter)

### Recommendations for KU

1. Seek Board of Regents approval to reduce the total number of hours required to receive a baccalaureate degree from the current level of 124 hours to 120 hours.
2. Create a university-wide curriculum committee.
3. Create a position of academic leadership with responsibility for undergraduate education across the university, perhaps vice provost for undergraduate education.
4. Adopt a common learning outcomes approach to general education.
5. Reduce the total number of hours required for General Education from 71-72 hours to something closer to 30-45 hours of requirements, the range typical of other universities that have recently revamped their general education requirements.

### Findings

#### *General category:*

- General Education reform is common theme at many institutions. Eighty-nine percent of institutions report being in some stage of assessing or modifying their general education program (Hart Associates, 2009)
- Active learning is the more prevalent emphasis in general education reform models.
- Board of Regents policy stipulates that regents universities require a minimum of 124 credit hours for baccalaureate degrees; this is higher than the national average of 120 hours.
- KU is significantly out of step with number of hours required for General Education. On average, KU requires between 30-50 percent more credit hours in General Education than other universities that have reformed their requirements within the past decade.
- General Education requirements for KU students present a considerable obstacle to timely progress toward a baccalaureate degree.
- To encourage students to persist at KU and graduate on time, some attention must be paid to reforming general education requirements

#### *Structure:*

- There are two common models used to approach general education: a distribution or menu approach and a common learning outcomes approach. KU uses the distribution model.
  - Distribution model: focuses on students obtaining broad content
  - Common Learning Outcomes model: focuses on students gaining critical competencies across disciplines
- Several universities have a structure that concentrates freshmen/sophomores in an administrative unit (with names such as General College, or University College) that is responsible for offering the General Education curriculum. KU does not have such a structure. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences functions as the unit with de facto responsibility for freshmen/sophomores because most KU students are admitted to the College for their first two years of study.
- Most universities have an individual who is responsible for academic leadership related to General Education curriculum for the entire university. This is often someone with a title such as Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education or Dean of Undergraduate Education. KU does not have such an individual. The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences serves as the individual with de facto responsibility.

- Most universities have a university-wide curriculum committee that addresses university-wide undergraduate and graduate issues, such as total number of hours needed for baccalaureate degree and General Education curriculum requirements. KU does not have such a structure.

*General Education Reform Trends:*

- Universities that have adopted comprehensive General Education reform tend to move toward a common learning outcomes model of General Education.
- Universities that rely on a distribution approach to General Education curriculum and that have undertaken recent reforms have tended to
  - Reduce the number of hours required (to the 30-45 credit hour range).
  - Create fewer and broader categories for these distribution requirements.

*KU General Education Requirements:*

- KU requires between 71 and 72 hours (out of 124) for General Education. This is an extraordinarily high proportion of total credit hours to graduate. This situation leaves little flexibility for students as they pursue their major requirements, affording students with few opportunities to explore electives.
- KU's General Education requirements are heavily weighted toward the humanities. It has comparatively few requirements in the natural sciences.
- According to CLAS data, 18 percent of students applying for degree (out of an approximate 2000 each spring semester) are deemed ineligible for the degree due to unfulfilled requirements.
- KU's general education requirements for baccalaureate degree that are most frequently identified as unmet at time of Application for Degree are the following:
  - Humanities courses, the finely grained requirements for students to take courses distributed among subcategories within the Humanities among: HT (Historical Studies), HL (Literature and the Arts) and HR (Philosophy and Religion)
  - Western Civilization
  - Math (Note, KU has a policy regarding "continuous enrollment," but it is generally not enforced.)
- The KU Board of Regents requirement that students complete at least of 45 Junior-Senior hours also functions as an impediment to timely graduation, especially for transfer students.
- According to CLAS data, the average student who transfers from a community college or other university must take 12-15 hours of course credit above and beyond the total degree hours required to meet KU's distribution degree requirements.

**Best practices for General Education**

- Use general education and the major in complementary and mutually supportive ways. For example, allow departments to control General Education expectations for their majors.
- Reinforce core competencies across the curriculum (writing, computation, second language, listening).
- Offer opportunities for freshman year experience
  - Sensitize students to value of general education
  - Use topical common courses with embedded general education content
- Offer "prescriptive" degree maps, degree map milestones, and "What-if" degree maps that allow students to plan and map out their progress meeting major and general education requirements.
- Create and offer Interdisciplinary Topical Clusters that focus on a set of problems or issues of importance to society as substitutes for disciplinary-based menu approach.
- Connect liberal and professional learning.

- Expect all departments to incorporate germane “liberal arts” issues in their curricula (the ethics of accounting, the rhetoric of economics, the history of chemistry, the sociology of health care)
- Expect liberal arts disciplines to manifest awareness of and appreciation of issues of professional education
- Offer capstone courses within the major that integrate general education competencies into active learning experiences.
- Encourage active learning with emphasis on hands on projects (undergraduate research, apprenticeships, fieldwork, service learning).
- Assess general education learner outcomes through student products (rubrics applied to examples of student work, capstone course projects, surveys, self-reports, standardized national tests).

### Background information regarding other universities

1. Listing of other universities’ requirements for General Education (source: committee members’ web surfing)
  - (i) Iowa State
    - (1) 35 hrs=Arts and Sciences
    - (2) 12.5 hrs additional English, library experience, and language
    - (3) Common learning outcomes assessment based
  - (ii) Missouri
    - (1) Just developed new General Education requirements
    - (2) 27 hrs across three broad categories
  - (iii) Penn State: 45 hrs
  - (iv) Oklahoma: 40 hrs
  - (v) Indiana U.
    - (1) New campus-wide general education requirements
    - (2) “Common Grounds” = 31 hrs
    - (3) “Shared Goals” = 9 hrs (Advanced Writing, Data Interpretation, Diversity/enrichment)
  - (vi) UNC and OK have an undergraduate college for entering freshmen

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 Hart Associates, May 2009, “Trends and Emerging Practices in General Education,” Based on A survey among Members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington, D.C.