

**University of Kansas
Student Success
Graduation Milestones Priority Group
Final Report
June 2008**

**Co-Leaders: Diann Burright, Ph.D. and Rueben Perez
Facilitator: Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle, Ph.D.**

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Introduction

In summer 2007, Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle completed preliminary study and fact-finding on a Four-Year Graduation Initiative Proposal, including the concepts of graduation milestones and class connections (see Appendix A). As a result of this preliminary work, it was determined by the Office of the Vice Provost for Student Success that a Graduation Milestones Priority Group would be formed to devote further study and discussion to this overall concept.

With co-leaders Diann Burrigh and Rueben Perez, the first meeting of the Milestones group met in October 2007 to begin work on this task.

Executive Summary

- Charge:* Develop a Graduation Milestones proposal that incorporates two mechanisms to enhance timely graduation and student success: pathways to graduation and class connections. Pathways to graduation should include Student Success programs, practices, and policies that mark milestones and provide support for students to progress to graduation, from the freshman to the senior class. It should include expectations for students' success and engagement at each level, and assistance with transition from one level to the next. Class connections could include distinctive programs for each class, including a class council, liaison, theme, service project and website. Include assessment and communication/promotion components, and a review of the use of e-portfolios and other methods for tracking progress. Explore linking these programs to the Tuition Compact which provides "students a powerful incentive to finish their degrees on time."
- Outcome:* Students will have access to clearly marked paths to graduation, accomplished through appropriate Student Success programs and practices that clarify student milestones. Students will have designated methods for developing class identity, connecting to students in their class, and making the transition from class level to class level. The overall goal is supporting timely graduation.

*Recommendations:*Long Term—

- 1) Creating an *Office of Retention and Milestones* or *Retention and Graduation Office*.
- 2) Establishing and implementing a more comprehensive and efficient Satisfactory Academic Progress system.

Short Term—

- 1) Adopting and utilizing a year-by-year Milestones/markers list, named *Your Jayhawk Journey*.
- 2) Creating an interactive website of the Milestones list, to function as a parallel companion piece to the Four-Year Tuition Compact.
- 3) Forming a Milestones Advisory Board.
- 4) Developing an enhanced and collaborative relationship with the Board of Class Officers (BOCO).
- 5) Embracing and maintaining the concept of the yearly class mission statements.

Participants: Jennifer Alderdice, KU Alumni Association

Laura Bauer, SILC
 Tyler Blair, SILC Graduate Student
 Kristine Kuhr Fowler, KU Athletics
 David Gaston, UCC
 Marla Herron, OUR
 Melissa Johnson, UCC
 Lisa Kring, Kansas Unions
 Trevor Loney, UAC
 Kim McNeley, CLAS Student Academic Services
 Ryan Northrup, BOCO Undergraduate Student
 Precious Porras, OMA/SMRC
 Mary Ann Rasnak, AAAC
 Heidi Simon, OAS
 Sara Vancil, OSFA
 Laura Vande Brake, DSH

Process

During the initial meeting, Stefani Gerson, higher education masters program student reported to the group that she and two other classmates (Ashley Kockler and Jessica Ward) were working on a “Class Connections” program as their class project for ELPS 885: Assessment and Program Evaluation in Higher Education (see Appendix B). (They were guided to take on this project via Kathryn’s inquiry to the instructor for assistance, and were also informed by her initial proposal.)

Additional discussion during that first meeting included brainstorming about barriers to students’ graduating in four years (Appendix C), as well as further discussion and explanation of a leadership program (beginning in the first year) at Texas Christian University <http://www.sds.tcu.edu/firstyear/default.asp>, which served as a benchmark

institution for the “Class Connections” project (and would continue to serve as a model for discussion and ideas throughout the priority group’s tenure).

The group (listed above) began meeting bi-weekly in November, with discussions ending in April. It was agreed upon early on that the two basic concepts to be considered, *identity* and *progression* were key in defining the work and outcomes of the group. Given the dedicated class project dealing with the identity portion of the concept, the group decided to focus their time and efforts on progression towards graduation.

One guiding concept became clear and led the formation of the process and final recommendations—*providing a “how to” companion piece for the tuition compact was key*. Since students and families knew they could pay the same tuition for four years, the group felt compelled to provide the guidelines/markers/milestones that spelled out the academic and college experience pathways that complimented the financial plan.

As the makeup of the priority group included representation from half of the Student Success units and major players from other academic and service units on campus, our first task began with identifying and pulling together the currently-existing programs, practices, and processes that already guided students’ progression toward degree completion. These were discussed year by year (Year 1, Year 2, etc.), and it became apparent how many services and programs already exist to assist progression—again it reminded us how communication and collaboration across units was essential for the most effective service to students.

Along with developing these lists of services and programs, there was much discussion related to the sharing of information and communication of these important messages to students. Promotional ideas and suggestions were shared, again oftentimes utilizing existing structures in order to get these messages out. Use of Hawk Notes, asking the ‘Campaigns’ class in the School of Journalism to package/create our message, demonstration of the KEEP toolkit (online portfolio) <https://portfolio.ku.edu> by Dan Bernstein (CTE), and visuals such as ‘Build the Campanile’ (similar to the United Way campaign Jayhawk) were some of the ideas and possibilities offered.

In addition, the conversations of the group included article reviews of related issues and concepts at other institutions across the country:

<http://chronicle.com/daily/2007/12/1020n.htm>,

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i10/10a02602.htm>.

Another portion of time was spent on the idea of the “sophomore slump” and what kinds of enhancements or programs could be aimed at this ‘invisible’ group.

Findings

After sifting and sorting through a myriad of information and discussion material, a visual ‘circles’ representation was utilized to help make meaning of this information (Appendix D). Thinking of the students’ experience in terms of the social, scholastic, and service realms (culminating in the creation of the ‘self’) was helpful in order to frame the essence of the lists of services and programs. These circles (domains) were also

instrumental in providing the framework for the ‘roadmap’ to successful completion of a KU degree in a timely manner.

This framework includes an overarching theme for each year, supported by a mission statement. Beginning with pre-KU and progressing through Year 4, *Your Jayhawk Journey* spells out a list (akin to a ‘Top 10’) of milestones/markers that successful students will reach along their path toward graduation. Campus events are also included that exemplify the mission and support the milestones listed (Appendix E). While not intended to be an all-inclusive list, these items are what could be seen as ‘the essentials’, and will likely lead to enhancement and integration of other supporting structures, programs, resources, and efforts across campus, which further encompasses the total student experience—helping to form the ‘self’.

Your Jayhawk Journey was developed with a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences student in mind. Therefore, students admitted to the freshman-entry schools of Architecture and Urban Design, Engineering, and Fine Arts, as well as those admitted directly into the Honors Program, could have more specialized (or altered) lists.

An important component of the roadmap is the inclusion of specific academic markers at the very beginning of each year’s list. These satisfactory academic progress markers spell out credits needed at the end of each year to realistically reach graduation in four years. One of the specific discussion items from the group was a notification mechanism to let students know where they stood (credit-wise) at the end of each semester and/or year, including a recommendation for summer school or additional semester credits as needed. A notification system such as this could further support the messages shared with students at New Student Orientation and during advising periods—“15-17 credits are needed each semester to graduate in 4 years”.

Vision and Recommendations

The group’s vision and recommendations include both long term and short term items, and assume an urgent need for such Milestones efforts, as an overall 4 year graduation rate of 31% (for the Class of 2002) is certainly unacceptable for a flagship institution such as the University of Kansas.

Long Term

As with any project that draws programs and services from multiple units across campus, coordination and oversight of this collaboration is key to unifying the messages, structure, and progress of the initiative. It is with this mindset that we recommend the creation of an *Office of Retention and Milestones* or *Retention and Graduation Office*. This should be a shared effort between the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice Provost for Student Success, in order to weave the academic and student affairs functions together in this effort. At minimum, a Coordinator (which could be a joint position) should be hired to lead the campus-wide coordination of services supporting the Milestones effort.

Recognizing that retention and progress is a concern for all academic and University units, coordination, communication, and organization of these efforts takes on many different approaches. Having one central office (or position) to oversee these efforts and services would produce a sincere and targeted University approach to increasing our student retention and graduation rates.

Another long term goal is that of establishing and implementing a more comprehensive and efficient Satisfactory Academic Progress system across campus that would monitor the progress, or lack thereof, of students in coursework, credits, and general campus hurdles that lead to holds on their accounts (preventing enrollment and academic progress). The system would help identify problem areas that students would need to address before being allowed to progress (i.e. repeat a course).

Short Term

One of the most integral parts of the Milestones group's effort is the year-by-year Milestones/markers list, named *Your Jayhawk Journey*. This list (Appendix E) is intended to function primarily as an interactive website highlighting the critical steps and yearly missions (discussed in general above) in a four-year (and pre-KU) series. The website would include specific academic markers along with suggestions for how a student can enhance and maximize their time at KU, while progressing toward graduation in a timely (4 year) fashion. This website could be integrated into the new Advising Tool as an additional component as well, providing further visibility and increased use. The site could also be authenticated and provide 'year recognition' with students' login (much like the new University Career Center website www.kucareerhawk.com).

In the communication and integration of the messages inherent in this website, the emphasis will be on this effort serving as a parallel companion piece to the Four-Year Tuition Compact. The goal is to emphasize the "Journey" as the "how" you graduate, and the Tuition Compact as the "how" you plan economically; both in four years if program appropriate. While the website would be the primary format of this message, multiple forms of communication of this message and the corresponding list are also recommended—including Admissions recruitment materials, Orientation presentations and information, University catalogs, departmental brochures, etc.

Another recommendation central to the group's effort is the creation of a Milestones Advisory Board comprised of "advisors" representing each class, Board of Class Officers (BOCO) representatives, and key administrators who are connected with retention and graduation efforts. [Examples of potential class advisors could be: (Student) Alumni Association or Student Involvement and Leadership Center staff for Year 4 students, CLAS Student Academic Services or University Career Center staff for Year 3 students, Academic Achievement and Access Center or Department of Student Housing staff for Year 2 students, and University Advising Center or Office of Admissions and Scholarships staff for Year one students.]

In order to further infuse this message into the culture and fabric of the University, an enhanced and collaborative relationship with BOCO must be established. As BOCO

serves as a representative student voice, giving a ‘student face’ and involvement to this initiative, their efforts could be expanded to include the operation of retention efforts, assistance with promoting class identity, inclusion as active members of the Milestones Advisory Board (see recommendation above), and partners with the class “advisors” (as described above).

An additional recommendation would be to work across campus to embrace and maintain the concept of the yearly class mission statements as outlined in *Your Jayhawk Journey*. The integration of existing programs, activities, and events is key to supporting these mission statements, and with student support and buy-in (as led by BOCO), celebrating ‘theme’ years or highlighting milestones and markers from the website of *Your Jayhawk Journey* would help the messages infiltrate the campus culture. Celebrations or recognitions of Milestones could be integrated into this initiative as well—for example, there are already “class” t-shirts for Year one students, perhaps special calendars/planners for Year 2 students and pins or “grad in 4” tassels for Year 4 students.

Summary

While this Priority group’s task was largely conceptual in nature, it was reaffirming to learn that many of the units across campus are already engaged in the programs, services, and events that are highlighted in this report. The remaining problem is the collaboration, cooperation, and integration of these ‘pieces’ into a cohesive whole that students can logically and realistically follow in order to progress effectively and successfully to graduation. Given the current and growing emphasis on timely graduation efforts as related to increasing tuition costs, the recommendations in this report are solid, manageable, and realistic, but only initial steps toward achieving this goal. Over time, the retention and graduation rates at KU can improve, but not without coordinated and centrally-supported attention.

We hope these recommendations are viewed with the utmost care and consideration, and are actively pursued in order to address this important concern on our campus.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attached: Appendices A-E