**Student Success**  
**Communication Strategies Priority Group**  
**Report and Recommendations**  
**May 4, 2004**

**Charge:** Review the communications used to share information with students, faculty and staff. Note strengths and weaknesses. Include recommendations for improvements and a suggested timeline.

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**Summary:**  
The Communication Strategies Priority Group began its work by identifying the various audiences of Student Success units and the various communications methods available. The group narrowed its focus to a workable scope by targeting four primary audiences: students, faculty, staff and parents. Primary communication methods were print, web based (email and websites) and verbal. Student Success departments were asked to provide copies of “primary” publications for evaluation. Publications range from those produced by University Relations to desktop brochures and flyers. Departmental home pages were also reviewed. Group members found the assignment to initially be a daunting task until a direction and approach were determined. The content and information in the publications is present, complete and correct. However, it is often hard to find or understand and the inconsistency of layout and theme places an undue burden on the audience. The following over-riding themes were identified:  
**Strengths:** Student Success departments produce much good information. Some evaluation is being done.  
**Weaknesses:** There is little to no standardized format in print or web. There is little to no use of a standardized theme or identity in print or web. Web navigation is not consistent. There is no apparent coordination between web and print communication.
**Broad Recommendations**

Establish a Strategic Communication Group

Information dissemination needs to be function driven, not department driven.

More information needs to be directed to parents.

Communication should take the audience perspective, as opposed to the “KU insider” perspective.

Over the course of our discussions a list of topics emerged for future consideration and recommendations. This list was evaluated and sorted into 4 categories: strategic planning, communication issues, orientation/reorientation and research/evaluation. The following is our report and recommendations.

**Communication Issues**

**Synopsis:** Student Success offices produce a large number of printed publications and Web pages, which indicate a good faith effort to communicate with key audiences -- current and prospective students, current and new faculty and staff, and parents. However, in a review of publications and websites, we observed the following:

1. **The materials we reviewed were, collectively, a hodgepodge.** The publications – online and in print -- describe various services and are rich in piecemeal information, but few provide a big picture or an overall roadmap.

2. **Text in everything from printed brochures to web pages is often jargon-ridden and not organized nor written with new or first-time readers in mind.** We communicate in a blanket informational, bureaucratic style that often fails to be lively or promotional or to give overviews that would be friendly or persuasive to the uninitiated.

3. **We were surprised by the lack of information targeted to parents and families of KU students.**

4. **The web is underutilized in several respects.** We have token home pages for prospective and current students and parents but they don’t really function as “information hubs.” They consist primarily of lists of links to other offices. They generally lack tools such as FAQs, overviews, or glossaries of terms that might be confusing. Printed publications and related websites rarely reference each other in a coordinated way.

**Specific recommendations:**

- **The University should consider combining its several communication pieces for parents into a single, effective and engaging e-mailed publication.** We envision this communication piece as an e-newsletter that links to a standing Website, much as “KU Connection,” the e-newsletter for alumni does. We also discussed the possibility of a parent association or a similar point-of-contact for parents.

- In general, **Student Success communications should be more function-driven rather than office- or department-driven.**
- **Student Success should give priority to developing more effective web-based communications and consider setting guidelines** and recommendations to guide their development. Such as:
  - Adequate staff support and training (a toolbox) should be made available for print and web publications.
  - Student Services should follow the University’s official web template and other visual identity recommendations as they evolve from the Visual Image Team of the university’s marketing effort. Our publications and web pages should have a cohesive look and feel.
  - Student Success offices should consider how their web sites and printed publications relate in content and organization to how information appears through the student portal. Many on the task force were aware of the student portal but had little first hand familiarity with it.
  - Consider an "executive summary" style website targeting specific audiences, giving them the lay of the land for finding information. Where university processes are complex, text should start with brief statements from which one can “drill down” to more detailed explanations, and finally to links giving the full rules & regulations.”
  - Consider having a Student Success Website-of-the-week on the student portal.
  - Web-based parent communication should be in plain language. Like all web communication, a parents homepage should be function-based, only referring to a department when an address, phone number or contact information is needed.
  - Student Services should work closely with Information Services to explore how "push" technology might be used to send information to constituent groups through the K-You portal.

- **Web and printed publications should work in tandem.**

- **Communication with parents should begin during the recruitment communication cycle.** Parents could sign up for a parent e-newsletter that has a web-based home containing other information and links to other KU sites. A “wallet card” with the KU parent URL and helpful phone numbers and dates could be provided. When a prospective student is admitted or enrolls, an updated card could go to the parent.

- **We need better collective coordination of "newsworthy" and promotional information** (timely rankings, accolades, etc.) about our programs or activities, so this information can be a resource for all KU departments and staff. Updating and maintaining this information is critical.
- In light of the evolving demographics of the state, **we recommend consideration for some publications to be in Spanish language**, especially for parents whose first language may be Spanish.

- **We recommend that campuses clearly communicate Student Success services available to their students, and that Student Success service providers clearly communicate their services available to students regardless of campus attended.** For example, Lawrence Student Success units providing services on the Edwards Campus may use the Edwards logo as a button on their website to take Edwards students to information relevant to them.

- **Student Services should consider how to respond to those who praise or complain** and how to inform them of what is being done to address their issues.

**Orientation/Reorientation**

**Synopsis:** In order to effectively deliver programs and resources, it is necessary for there to be some knowledge of the range of services available. Faculty and staff of the University can provide valuable referrals and can utilize some Student Success services if they are knowledgeable. While it is not reasonable for all faculty and staff to receive personal contact, new faculty and staff could benefit from a personalized introduction to Student Success opportunities. For the general faculty staff population, good print and web-based information will be helpful. Several programs have existed in the past or are currently in use that should be reinstated or continued.

- The **Desktop Referral Guide** is a useful resource and should be continued with the widest possible distribution. Consideration should be given to making it available online as well.

- The **New Faculty Welcome program** should be reinstated to give faculty a personalized welcome to KU and an introduction to Student Success services. This program should consist of department directors making one-on-one contact with new faculty, delivering a welcome, printed material and a brief orientation on services and how we can be helpful to them and their students. Opportunities for collaboration may also ensue.

- New University staff attending the **New Staff Orientation** program and new Graduate Teaching Assistants attending the **GTA Orientation** should receive as much information on Student Success as we are allowed to give them in the short amount of time available.

- The **Student Success New Staff Orientation** program should be reinstated. It is essential that Student Success staff be familiar with the programs and services of all Student Success units. We recommend that new staff have an organized tour of unit offices and receive an overview of services available during that tour.

- We recommend that a **calendar of important student dates** be established which will “push” an announcement onto Student Portal pages or other appropriate technology. Announcements must have a broad-based student interest pool and be serious/appropriate in nature. Consideration should also be given for this calendar.
being available on a web site in list form as well. Possible Portal announcements are as follows:

- Enrollment begins on (date). It is time to make an appointment with your advisor.
- (date) is the last day to drop a class.
- (date) is the deadline to designate a class Credit/No Credit.
- Remember to sign up for Optional Campus Fees when you enroll.
- The deadline for submitting a FAFSA form is (date).
- Football tickets can be picked up at the stadium ticket office beginning (date).
- Timely student safety tips could also be posted.

**Research/Evaluation**

With the objective of controlling publications distributed in the name of KU, encouraging regular evaluation of communication methods at the department level, and making methods of communication more efficient and effective, we recommend the following:

- All departments will create and **maintain a comprehensive list** of all pieces of communication (print, email, web) originating in that department, as well as a schedule of when each piece will be created, printed and/or modified. “Touchstone” brochures and communications should be identified and should meet more rigid standards. Any publication supported by University funds should be on a fixed schedule for review and update of those publications.

- Each department will develop a schedule to regularly **evaluate the effectiveness of their communication methods**, and provide general guidelines that would help all offices to conduct these evaluations. Suggestions might include:
  - Establish objectives for each piece of communication, and measure those objectives.
  - Methods for gathering focus groups or conducting surveys of target audiences.

- We recommend the appointment of a university-wide communications overseer or oversight committee, to which Student Success and all other University units would submit the above schedules and evaluation findings. The committee will serve to collect and analyze data and regularly refine high-level guidelines for all university communications. If this group does not already exist, it should be formed. On-going sector-wide focus groups that include Parents, Students, Alumni, Faculty and Staff should be established to aid evaluation. Publications should have a cohesive look and feel. The review committee would maintain, refine, disseminate and enforce the guidelines and tracks the assessment, evaluation, review and follow up to provide continuity and accountability. If no University-wide committee is established, we recommend a Student Success committee or overseer.

**Strategic Planning**

- We recommend that a working group be appointed to develop and communicate a cohesive identity for Student Success.

- We recommend that a working group be appointed to develop a true strategic communication plan for Student Success incorporating the above recommendations in this report.