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Faculty Employability Fellows Impact Project

The Quality Enhancement Plan and the Employability Talent Pipeline

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The employment and job landscape (driven by automation, Machine Learning (ML), and Artificial Intelligence (AI)) continue to change dramatically. One strategy to improve the likelihood for graduates to compete and thrive in this new employment environment is to focus their educational experiences on skills immune to the ever-changing technological skill requirements in the workplace — skills not currently offered on a widespread basis across colleges and universities.

A Historically Black College/University (HBCU), KSU's students often encounter pejorative perspectives rooted in implicit biases that perhaps under-prepared and low-income HBCU students should not have the same opportunities as students from the other regional Predominantly White Institutions (WPIs). The Fellows are committed to working to dispel these biases by championing the concept of employability with other faculty at KSU and being a part of the solution for raising the university's level of student success.

OPPORTUNITY/PROPOSAL

The KSU Faculty Employability Fellows' employer interviews consisted of employers from the national, state/regional, and local levels. The challenges employers identified in young graduates included lack of people skills, lack of problem solving skills, inability to communicate both orally and in written form, and the failure to understand and adapt to the corporate or workplace culture and norms. *Additionally*, the KSU Fellows identified that KSU is an unknown entity to many employers and its students/graduates are a "hidden population" as compared to the larger regional universities.

Kentucky State University's (KSU) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)*, "[Learning that Works](#)" is intended to cultivate a learning environment in which students acquire lifetime-relevant learning and prepare them for the 21st-century work environment. This KSU Impact Project develops an *action plan* to implement aspects of the KSU QEP across the entire university to enhance the development of the [QA Commons' Essential Employability Qualities](#) (EEQs) among students.

SOLUTION

As the employment environment is an outcome-driven culture, the focus of the KSU QEP is setting the conditions for improved employability outcomes based on the following goals:

1. As the state's smallest regional university, enhance visibility around employability;
2. Leverage KSU's unique employability position and Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU) / Land Grant status in Kentucky; and
3. Incorporate Best Practices to shape the KSU Talent Pipeline and enhance employability.

IMPLEMENTATION

To accomplish the goals, Dean Brooks and Dr. Gregory have established three proposals:

1. **Improve oral and written communication skills.**

The KSU QEP states that a process has been agreed upon in which the entire KSU campus community (faculty, staff, students, and University stakeholders) will have an opportunity to suggest ideas and help with their development.

Utilizing this process, the Faculty Fellows will propose that communication skills should be emphasized across all campus programs and that professional/corporate correspondence

and communication will be embedded into the student learning objectives across all academic disciplines at KSU.

They will suggest that mock interviews will be incorporated to provide students with the opportunity to executive some of the communication skills learned in the classroom. The mock interviews would provide students with constructive feedback from an interview panel made up of Career Services personnel, faculty members, and professionals from partnerships through Handshake. Social networking opportunities would be provided for students to confidentially work with alumni mentors in overcoming fears, anxieties, and concerns about success and employment readiness as it relates to acceptable communication in the workplace and the importance of the ability to confidently articulate ideas and concepts in a corporate and/or government environment.

2. Mandatory Attendance at Career Fairs

Dean Brooks and Dr. Gregory envision a transformation of the KSU Career Services Department. They note that KSU has recently invested in the Career Services Department with key new hires and programs that have already been implemented. The Fellows aim to ensure that KSU students utilize the services of the Career Services Department throughout their entire time as a KSU student, and not just during their senior year. They propose making it mandatory for students to attend at least one Career Services event per semester in order to fulfill graduation requirements at KSU. This requirement would need to be a collaborative effort between Career Services, Academic Affairs, the Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association (SGA).

Additionally, the Fellows propose the establishment and/or expansion of departmental Advisory Boards to leverage the expertise of practitioners and industry leaders. These boards would provide opportunities for students to attend conferences, participate in networking projects, and engage with mentors in order to develop leadership skills.

3. An Employability Capstone Project

The creation of an Employability Capstone project would bring together and reinforce the Faculty Fellows first two proposals. They propose that, in the senior year, students work in teams with external stakeholders to demonstrate their capabilities. The Fellows will continue their networking processes to further develop this idea, as it will require coordination with internal (KSU) and external stakeholders alike.

IMPACT

It is clear to the Faculty Fellows that Employability is a critical topic to be addressed. As evidenced by the QEP, KSU is fully committed to the concept of employability. Additionally, the university is in the process of expanding the KSU brand in order to highlight the Essential Employability Qualities of its graduates. The Fellows believe sustainable success depends on cross-institutional collaboration with Career Services as the lead department.

** QEP is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) Quality Enhancement Plan, required for reaffirmation of accreditation.*