

Comments from Open Forum #8: Our University. Our Attributes.

A premise is that all higher education is facing dynamic challenges. Our future depends on our ability to articulate our distinctive attributes to meet the challenges ahead.

What are “post-traditional” students?

- “Post-traditional” is new term used because traditional students are no longer the majority who are enrolled in higher education. The majority of students don’t fit the traditional model (18-21 years, full-time, live on campus).
- On the question of “serving nontraditional students”, I interpreted it to be what we do well, not necessarily the size or number of who we serve.
- (GM) Do these options (on the screen) represent programs of distinction?
- I’m from the nursing department. Online education is what we do. We are a small area of the university, but I think our nursing program is distinctively known, because students tell us that; organizations that we are close to tell us that. I know that is anecdotal evidence. We are working on program evaluation. We know we are cost effective. We (nursing) do charge more, but we do things that make it work for our students, like using technology.

What do we mean when we say “Up close and personal?”

- By its nature, it is anecdotal, so I will give an example: one student tried two other master’s programs at another institution but felt faculty didn’t value her there, so she is returning here.
- It is a mistake to think of it in terms of class size only. It is the open door policy; investing in collaboration; a friendly, welcoming place to be.
- It doesn’t have to be like the song from Cheers, “everybody knows your name,” but someone should know your name.
- (GM) So, class size is not a proxy for “up close and personal.”
- It also means that you are up close and personal in the classroom because you don’t have large, 300-seat lecture hall classes where you are just a number.
- We had a candidate for a faculty position giving a presentation to a group of students. They were praising her style, but some students were asking if she would have that personal contact with students if she were hired.
- When I was recruited, I was told “we like our students here.” That’s a good indication of the “up close and personal” philosophy. You can know someone’s name and still not like them.
- It’s what makes the campus feel safe, as in a psychologically safe place. Students feel connected to each other and to faculty. All diversities feel welcomed.

- From an external perspective, “up close and personal” has meaning when employers say that they like getting interns from us. NKU helps get interns in a responsive manner without a lot of paperwork.

Does this really matter to students in a measureable way? If so, then why are our retention and graduation rates so low?

- Part of it is because of the age of students, the post-traditional, single parents, working multiple jobs, those other things that keep students from continuing.
- (GM) yes, that is some of it, but not all. Our peer institutions face those same challenges, and the graduation rate data is based only on the First-time Full-time entering students (who are not as likely to be post-tradition, single parents, etc.).
- “Up close and personal” takes time to develop. It is harder to do the first year when students are here as freshmen; not as easy as with juniors and seniors.
- Students who want to get to know faculty will be able to, but wallflower students are hard to pull in. Some students self-select their involvement level.
- Our freshmen are predominately doing general education courses which are largely (61%) taught by part-time faculty. No matter how excellent part-time faculty are, they are not as available or accessible as full-time faculty. That’s not a particularly healthy ratio. It may take those students a year to two to make contact with full-time faculty.
- My son said he wants to come here because I know my students by name.
- The Student Success Center is going to be a much needed asset. Currently, Norse advising is spread out and student may not know they even need the services and/or may not appreciate the value of those services.
- It used to be that parents said, if you stay at home and go to NKU, we will buy you a car. Now, students say this is the college of their choice.
- Based on market surveys and other surveys we’ve done, decisions used to be made by students and family based on cost and convenience. Then, about 5-10 years ago, the factors changed to more quality-focused than cost/convenience-focused. People on this side of the river are much more aware of quality and public engagement. Part of it has to do with where we advertise. It is a function of the cost of advertising here rather than there.
- I was a post-tradition student when I came here, but I am not sure that people know the “caring faculty and staff” until they are here on campus. But the small class size is well-known.
- The “up close and personal” happens to individuals long before they get here. People want to take Ken Shields’s UNV 101 class because they meet him at orientation sports camps. We make it feel like a friendly place to be before students are even here.

- I agree with her. If folks know us, then they feel the up close and personal. I work with families in the community (in Ohio) and they don't know us. A lot of teachers in our district got an undergraduate or graduate education from NKU, and they refer students to us. That's an untapped market.
- I have a senior in high school. The parents who are considering NKU usually talk about size of classes, quality of education. Usually parents say my child can succeed because of these factors. It's not good that it's not particular programs that they are attracted to.
- I met a girl scout recently in Ohio who is about 13 years old. She named NKU or UK as her choices for college. Her teacher talked to her about NKU. I think that is impressive. We are starting to make some inroads across the river.

Should we try to determine what we think is distinctive and try to sell it, or go to groups and ask what they want and build it for them?

- Both.
- I agree that both is the right answer. I heard that the employment rate for computer science graduates was 100%. That kind of success needs to be advertised.
- I agree that it is both. But we need to educate the public about NKU. I have walked kids of my kid's classes around campus; Big Brother program brought little brothers to campus. They left the campus very impressed. It is part of our responsibility to educate the future students about the value of these programs.
- I see the appeal of doing both, but from a resource allocation viewpoint, over time, there's been a significant investment in this institution to certain areas that we need to continue to build on. I wouldn't want us to be driven solely by what the market wants today. We don't want to eliminate what we have put a great deal of time and effort into already.
- I don't like the premise that we don't have programs already well-known. In settings with scholarship recipients, it is clear that recipients come here because of the reputation of the program, the theater department, as an example. Parents and students are here because of a specific program. Greaves science recipients are here to experience the undergraduate research program which is what drew them here. Informatics is another new one. The two together mesh well. There are some areas that are respected and recognized all over.

Most all comments here have focused on quality rather than convenience. (data presented on class size)

- How is class size calculated?
- IR has a sophisticated model to calculate lecture and lab combinations. They have worked with IT to take variations into account. Classes of one are removed.
- Do we know the average class size for freshmen and does that have an impact on learning?
- In the last several years, credit hours per FTE faculty have increased, with 30-32 as an average for freshmen classes; upper level courses average 15-ish. General education classes are large. Some will never grow in size like English writing, so other classes have grown up to 30-35. So, some have grown and others have not because they cannot.
- The average in our studies is slightly higher than 30.
- (GM) So, a major point may be that the pipeline bleeding may be from the class size from the lower level courses.
- I remember when students used to choose us because of low cost, but it is not so now; it is a more competitive market now and we need programs that make it look worthwhile to be here.
- Your voice in Frankfort matters. Just 20 or 30 people calling does make a difference. Use your home email or cell phone to do that.

There's probably not going to be substantial revenue increases from the state over the next 3-5 years. The state is faced with problems with the retirement funds and they aren't keen on using money to fix this problem. Are there things we can do better to grow revenue? Rather than focus on quality, we can focus on cash cows, as an example. There would probably be an audience for that.

- You have a TV station. You expressed concern about how to reach across the river – use the time on the channel and make some revenue.
- (GM) what about growing enrollment just for revenue?
- Quality would suffer if you start to offer programs just for the revenue.
- It's hard to pick programs we would want to profile because we like to think they are all good. The reverse is that weak programs can pull us down, but I do think there may be programs that are cash cows that have high rigor; research supports this.
- Have we ever looked at the mix of student enrollment like increasing those that are in the metro rate who would bring in more money?
- (GM) We would need more residential halls if we recruit more than 30 miles away.
- Wouldn't increasing retention increase revenue?

- (GM) Yes, one percent increase in retention translates roughly into \$1 million, or \$4 million per year after four years.

Should we identify a smaller set of “programs of distinction?”

- It depends. If we look at full-time, first-time students, we are losing them before they even get to the courses in those programs.
- I’m in the RN program and it has high outcomes. It is a strong program, but there’s no room for more students in the program; capacity is an issue. Only a small pool of students are going the route of the signature programs like nursing and computer science. We need to make sure we have a combination of programs and ask the community what they are looking for.
- We don’t have a good way to measure capacity at this point. I can’t imagine that we can compete in this environment over the next 20 years if we don’t choose signature programs in this competitive market. We need to decide what is unique about NKU; what do we have to offer. I think the college of Informatics is unique, rare. I am amazed at the program. I think faculty are interested in interdisciplinary work, and I haven’t seen that before (at other places). It’s a gold mine.
- (GM) Signature programs like Informatics can convey a broader reputation for the institution.
- This conversation scares me somewhat. Conceptually, it sounds great, but in Arts and Sciences, majors do not match specific careers. We are a very high service college, but we can’t show high graduation or placement rates. Those programs (A&S) will lose every time if we look at just raw numbers. This is a complex idea.
- Not as a rebuttal, but we should take a serious look at DAAP (Design, Architecture, Art and Planning) and CCM (College Conservatory of Music) programs at UC. I do think we need to look at signature programs because they give a halo effect over all the university. We have programs to consider such as informatics, theater, and psychology programs.
- The College of Informatics brought together different programs for collaborative new thinking. It captured what was already there and took us in a higher direction. We captured a prior investment and packaged and created it in a new way, which is a strength.
- Social work is a growing and developing program, but there is a cost to do this. We will attract and keep our best students if we have our own master’s program. Quality has a cost to it.
- (GM) Do we have a process to determine new programs? Does anyone measure the institutional benefit?
- The faculty, deans, chairs, and provost should make the decisions.

- Right now, there's a pre-proposal brought to the Council of Deans. A decision is made at the Council of Deans before faculty do a full proposal. It also must go through CPE.
- (GM) Does that process answer if the program is in the strategic best interest of the university?
- It makes me nervous if we only focus on one signature program. We have many programs that are highly regarded. All are well accredited and recognized.
- Looking forward, not backward, we've had a "program of distinction" identified in CINSAM. It was selected by us. It was a program that brought together a number of disciplines, and that tells us that this is important for the future. It was also built around public engagement and brought a lot of departments together. I don't know if it caught hold outside the university; the program has been positive, but I don't think it has given us a halo effect from a marketing perspective.
- There may be a resource impact on other areas if we look at signature programs, not just at the top level.
- I worked for UC for a couple of years. All the colleges at UC have recruitment offices. That spreads out the marketing efforts to sophomores and juniors. In California, we had furloughs every other Friday because of the budget crisis. They were looking at graduate programs to develop signature programs where they could charge higher prices with lower costs to generate revenues.
- The resources would have to come from other colleges if we pledged resources to signature programs. We are turning away 100 qualified applicants in nursing because of faculty numbers and accreditation class size limitations. We are online.

What are we known for as a leader?

- Innovation is a word we use all the time. NKU is known as an innovative leader, for the technology that it embraces; for not being reactive but a leader in technology. We hear that from corporate and non-student feedback.
- Serving post-traditional students is something for which we should be a leader according to the answers given on the slide question, but from an earlier slide we answered that we aren't best at it.
- We are good with active learning strategy and undergraduate research; at conferences, peers are shocked at what we are doing. CINSAM does that, and it is a trickle-down effect for that to grow in other disciplines.

Any comments on athletics and Division 1?

- I can already tell the difference by the coverage we get on TV and radio.
- (GM) at a game, the Legally Blonde production was showcased; it gives us an opportunity to show what we are doing in the academic division.

Transfer students?

- In Biology, many of our best students are transfer students. We want to recruit more quality incoming freshmen.
- Transfer applications are down slightly. KCTCS applications are up; Cincinnati State is down. The conversion from quarter hours to semester hours is somewhat problematic. Community college enrollments have declined recently, so there's a smaller pool. 40% of our transfers come from other 4-year schools.
- We have increased our degrees conferred, and only 40% of those are from the first-time, full-time cohorts. Others are transfer students, spring starters, etc.