

OUR Time. OUR Plan. OUR Future.

SWOT Analysis

Internal Strengths

1. Up close and personal culture; small class sizes in comparison to others; safe campus; recognized for health/wellness
2. Financially stable, efficient, and lean institution
3. Strong foundation for serving high demand areas of information technology and healthcare
4. Strength in curricular and co-curricular activities and services: student organizations, mentoring program, learning communities, NORSE Advising Center, study abroad program, PACE, and undergraduate research opportunities
5. Move to Division I increases marketing exposure and recruitment opportunities
6. Strong commitment to the community, providing leadership and creating a strong economic impact to the region
7. New business accelerators and incubators and external alliances
8. Well-developed IT infrastructure and resources that serve students and provide support to academic colleges better than other universities
9. High quality faculty and competitive entry-level salaries that help recruit new high quality faculty and staff
10. Attractive to growing market of adult learners, veterans, graduate students
11. Well-developed, national model for public engagement opportunities
12. Improving physical facilities and outdoor spaces that appear contemporary and attractive; parking accommodations better than universities located in urban areas
13. History of being responsive to dynamic changes and willing to take risks; actively engaging in alliances to pursue innovation
14. Stronger academically prepared incoming student body, which is leading to a stronger reputation, with more students identifying NKU as their first choice
15. Development of new programs to meet area needs, including extensive and growing number of online courses and programs
16. Distinction among peer institutions of having a law school

Internal Weaknesses

1. Inability to get a fair share of state appropriations combined with a high dependency on tuition, resulting in insufficient funds for new faculty positions, facilities growth, deferred maintenance, unfunded state mandates, faculty/staff compensation, and other investments
2. Low student retention rates and graduation rates – for all students and for minority students – compared to other Kentucky universities and national averages
3. Not a well-established “brand”; underdeveloped marketing presence
4. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty; aging of faculty may result in high turnover and a loss of strong talent and ability in near future
5. Limited residential capacity which affects the vibrancy of campus life
6. Lack of program offerings in some of the high-demand occupations for 2020, e.g.

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7. With a lean organization, there are too many obstacles and too little resource capacity to invest in strategic initiatives
8. Many students have long work hours, and they average fewer hours of study per week than the national average which negatively affects retention and student success
9. Not as low cost as in the past and not enough financial aid for students which contributes to their need to work longer hours and to a lower number of hours spent studying, which results in lower retention rates
10. Too many general education courses are taught by part-time staff which has an impact on student retention
11. Lack of mission focus – what do we really want to be?
12. Current measures of retention and graduation rates are not good metrics to use, since so many of our student population are post-traditional age
13. Underutilization of and easy access to timely, consistent, and accurate management information to support decision-making
14. Weak market share of transfer students and transfer assessments that are not as seamless as they should be
15. Limited student participation in co-ops, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities
16. Many outside of NKU are not familiar with the programs and services of the university and its contribution to the region
17. Difficulty in maintaining small class sizes in a constrained resource environment
18. Unsatisfactory student outcomes on writing, reading, and critical thinking skills which are valued by employers and provide graduates with a solid foundation for a sustainable, successful career
19. Lack of revenue diversification
20. Lack of infrastructure to support commercialization of university research, which could help the university generate revenue and become more self-sustainable
21. Limited flexible course scheduling for adult learners and students who work
22. Limited student involvement in leadership activities and co-curricular activities due to large number of commuters, working adults, and post-traditional-age students
23. Insufficient quality assurance in online courses
24. Better technology solutions needed for tracking public engagement activities
25. Not enough professional development and training in technology for faculty and staff
26. Policies are outdated, such as the faculty handbook; many “practices” are not documented as policies
27. Too many degrees and credentials do not lead to meaningful, well-paid jobs
28. Few alumni with political influence in Frankfort
29. Students stuck in pre-majors where monitoring and tracking is difficult
30. Inconsistencies with evaluating prior learning
31. Better technology solutions needed for alumni connections and tracking private, corporate, and alumni giving
32. Lack of well-defined roles and reassignment time for public engagement activities
33. Lack of foreign language requirement in general education
34. Difficult to verify students online and ensure security with testing for online courses

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External Opportunities

1. Division I status creates new opportunities for branding
2. Regional businesses and corporations are eager to build strong alliances with NKU, and they can provide opportunities for co-ops, internships, and experiential learning opportunities
3. High demand for healthcare and nursing professionals
4. High demand for IT professionals knowledgeable in “big data” and analytics
5. Increased residential housing can improve student engagement and campus vitality
6. Increased demand for experiential and on-demand learning
7. Increasing number of transfer students, veterans, and post-traditional-age students expected
8. Under-tapped market for increasing recruitment in regions outside of Kentucky, especially Ohio and Indiana
9. Growing population of adult learners provides opportunities to develop target programs to fit their needs
10. New ways to gain funding from the state can be explored
11. Identification of signature programs and partnerships would help capitalize on our expertise
12. High-demand graduate program(s) would attract and retain high-quality students
13. Good prospect for growing international student population
14. Local high schools and elementary schools want stronger relationships with NKU
15. Competitive advantage for workplace expansion and to become a greater economic driver in the region with increased marketing and public relations efforts to inform the region of NKU’s offerings and services
16. Demand for online course offerings is growing and offers flexibility in serving more students
17. Private partnerships to meet technology and facilities needs are a potential direction
18. Performance-based funding might increase state funds for NKU
19. Competitive advantage for on-demand learning options and competency-based learning
20. College degree is still valued highly by employers
21. High dollar donors are more apt to fund unique programs they support

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External Threats

1. Declining state and federal financial support which shifts the burden of higher education costs to students
2. Lack of rational state funding formula results in NKU receiving fewer state dollars per student than any other state university
3. Decline in the number of high school graduates expected over the next decade, both locally and nationally
4. Emerging trend and proliferation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) may lead to adult learners who focus on certification and badges rather than degrees
5. Affordability concerns and issues lead to higher loan debts and lower enrollment, especially with a growing amount of unmet financial assistance for lower income students
6. Increased competition for students in the region, some with lower tuition rates
7. Costs for benefits (especially KERS), technology, and capital investments are continuing to increase rapidly
8. Increased competition for high achieving students and for minority students
9. High school graduates who are unprepared academically for college negatively affect retention
10. Increased competition for diverse faculty and staff and for quality talent, in general
11. Increased competition for philanthropic resources, especially high dollar donors
12. Competition from other universities that offer programs not available at NKU
13. Competition from other universities offering experiential learning and competency-based programs preferred by employers
14. Low level of job growth for the region and the nation
15. The state mandatory caps on tuition, coupled with fewer state dollars makes it difficult to keep pace with inflationary forces
16. Funding based on outcomes metrics may cause further erosion of state funds
17. State policymakers give little support for serving out-of-state students
18. Competition from other universities offering online courses and programs not available at NKU
19. Ohio and other states implementing policies that retain transfer students
20. Public expectation that resources at NKU should be available free of charge (such as METS and CEAD) and that public engagement activities should be available for any request without recognition that public engagement activities are structured as a student learning experience
21. The public's questioning of the value of a college degree
22. Technology hackers and cyber terrorism cause more resources needed for cyber security and security audits