

The KSU R2 Roadmap To Success

Kennesaw State University seeks to establish itself as a top tier R2 university by 2023. The university will achieve this goal by (1) offering undergraduate students an exceptional education and a timely degree that prepares them to lead purposeful, productive and rewarding lives; (2) providing master and doctoral-prepared students with the education required for today's and tomorrow's complex fields, and; (3) producing research with relevance that creates and refines knowledge that is aligned to real-world applications.

Vision for Kennesaw State

Kennesaw State University has demonstrated dramatic growth and improvement in recent decades in multiple arenas, from enrollment to academics to athletics. Yet, its mission is different from other institutions across the region, and its community of students, faculty, staff and alumni are unique to this university. As such, Kennesaw State should not seek to mirror the success of other institutions. Instead, in its quest for excellence, KSU should embrace its own history, reflect on the experiences of others, and look toward the future in a way that promotes growth and success for the students of Kennesaw State University.

As the university plans for new heights, KSU must begin this quest based on its newfound national ranking and status. Kennesaw State University was recently classified by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education as an “R2” – a “Doctoral University” with “High Research Activity.” Concurrently, *U.S. News and World Report* recognizes Kennesaw State University as a national university. In addition, KSU's economic impact to Georgia exceeds \$1.4 billion, resulting in a three-fold return on the University's annual budget.

The university's contributions to the surrounding community and state are evident, but KSU can develop into an even better institution for its students, faculty, staff and alumni by focusing on a shared goal of becoming one of the best R2 universities in the nation. KSU is home to more than 35,000 students, making it the third largest university in Georgia and one of the 50 largest public institutions in the U.S. As such, this vision will require setting goals, developing strategies to meet those goals, and determining whether or not those goals have actually been met through concrete metrics. Just as importantly, it will require the collaboration and support of the entire KSU community.

*Kennesaw State University will establish itself as a top tier **R2 university** by preparing students for meaningful, productive lives through providing a high-quality, worthwhile education with an attainable path to graduating within four years (or a program's standard timeframe); by offering premier graduate and doctoral opportunities that lead to enhanced careers and wider community impacts; and by building upon its strong research foundation to produce premium research with real world applications.*

What does it mean to be an “R2?”

In its December 2018 update, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education evaluated 4,338 institutions of higher education, placing them in 33 institutional classifications ranging from “Special Focus Two Year” institutions to doctoral universities. The commission’s update to its classification system resulted in KSU moving into the higher R2 classification, designating the university’s transition from a “doctoral university” with “moderate research activity” to one with “high research activity.”

With the 2018 framework, doctoral universities now include “R1- Very High Research Activity,” “R2 – High Research Activity,” and “Doctoral/Professional Universities.” To be an R2 or R1, the university must spend at least \$5 million on research while yielding at least 20 “research/scholarship doctorates.” The level of research activity then determines whether an individual university is an R1 or R2. The new categorization means Kennesaw State is among only 260 institutions with an R2 or R1 designation. Classification as an R2 Doctoral University with High Research Activity places KSU among an elite group of only 6 percent of U.S. colleges and universities with an R1 or R2 status.

KSU will define for itself what it means to establish itself among the best R2 universities in the nation by addressing undergraduate, graduate and research success. Kennesaw State commits to quality and impactful research and outreach without compromising its focus on student success through exemplary instruction.

What does it mean to be “a top tier R2 university?”

A university’s Carnegie classification strongly correlates to a number of factors generally viewed as positive for a university. These include increased funding (including funding in state formulas, higher tuition rates, and competition-based funding), opportunities to offer graduate degrees and pilot innovative programs, perceived attractiveness to competitively sought faculty and students, and increased opportunities for faculty, staff, and students.

An indispensable element of being regarded as “a top tier R2 university” is achieving national recognition for the outstanding academic work of the university. This recognition is achieved based on the reputation and productivity of the university’s faculty; the number and quality of partnerships with industry, business, and government; the amount of external funding obtained; noteworthy, innovative, and interdisciplinary achievement in academic areas of distinction; the number and quality of patents, publications and other intellectual property developed; and the achievements and success of graduates. While academic work is central to this goal, it cannot achieve it alone. Co-curricular areas contribute to national visibility (e.g., athletics, the arts, and facility quality), building the positivity and importance associated with our school’s reputation. This visibility can then create a platform and opportunities to disseminate the university’s academic work. Of course, these activities and support create overall better student experiences, as well, and the best R2s will be those that prioritize their students.

From August through November of 2018, KSU's Graduate College and Office for Research conducted a comprehensive analysis of comparable universities that had employed specific and targeted strategies to significantly elevate their success in a relatively short period of time (five years or less). This analysis yielded five common themes that should be incorporated into each college-level strategy, as well as the overall university-wide plan.

1. Identify and implement areas of strategic emphasis and opportunity.
2. Establish tangible performance metrics for each goal and attach evaluation, reward, and accountability plans to each metric.
3. Ensure resource allocations align with expectations and performance.
4. Leverage opportunities, particularly interdisciplinary options that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries.
5. Be specific in goal setting and innovative in developing solutions.

The Roadmap

Creating the roadmap to set the course for KSU to establish itself as a top tier R2 university requires that the entire university community collaborate in developing unit and university-level goals. These goals should always put students first as we implement strategies to enhance student undergraduate success, develop new goals to impact student's professional options through enhanced graduate opportunities, and impact our region and world via increased research output. To achieve this vision, all elements of the university must contribute to these key goals. Each college's goals, strategies and objectives should support and advance the overarching mission of the university.

In 2016, a survey of approximately 5,000 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders of the consolidated KSU community demonstrated a high degree of affection for the University and pride in its success. While the university grew at a remarkable pace, the general consensus was the growth may have lacked a centralized, long-term strategy. A frequent comment was that the university seemed to be trying to "be all things to all people." Our future progress should acknowledge that high-performing R2 universities consistently identify key areas of strategic emphasis and growth, structuring the institution to support growth in those areas and developing metrics to ensure the university does not stray from that road. These areas can be inclusive and encompassing but must be sufficiently specific to contribute to advancing the institution's specific goals.

Key factors utilized in identifying other institutions' areas of strategic emphasis and opportunity have included the university's historical mission; potential areas for engaging governmental and commercial sectors; geographic location; opportunities in areas in which the university has a history of high performance; concentrations of faculty and other resources; and potential for interdisciplinary collaboration across multiple units, faculty, and fields. KSU can identify our strengths in these areas to advance our mission of being ranked among the best R2s.

Perhaps the strongest correlation among high-performing universities involves establishing key, realistic, and fully integrated metrics for achieving unit and institutional goals, and matching reward and accountability components to those metrics. This helps ensure a large, organizationally complex university consisting of diverse units will move in concert toward common and mutually beneficial expectations.

Kennesaw State University should primarily focus on the three core elements of its mission: undergraduate education, graduate education, and research and scholarship. The following sections are the true “heart” of this roadmap, laying out goals the University and its colleges are expected to address.

Undergraduate Education

While variables in the Carnegie doctoral framework emphasize graduate degree production (particularly doctoral) and institutional research expenditures, high-quality undergraduate education is an essential element of the strategic plans of high-performing universities. Most importantly, it is the very foundation of Kennesaw State University, and as such, will always remain a core focus for the University.

KSU colleges should set specific goals for their undergraduate programs that are built around their students, strategic partnerships, and institutional goals for undergraduate education, with specific definitions of success. Each unit should (1) focus on moving students through their degree progression as efficiently as possible and into expected professions or graduate programs; (2) create interdisciplinary, innovative, and experiential educational opportunities capturing student interests, and; (3) promote interest and support for achievement in critical and/or high-demand fields.

Working within these themes, below are recommended strategies or metrics related to the undergraduate branch of the University likely to propel KSU forward. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, and colleges are encouraged to tailor their goals to the unique needs of their disciplines.

- Percentage of students graduating who do not exceed required credit hours
- Percentage of students meeting or exceeding RPG of comparators and aspirants
- Percentage of students able to schedule courses within semester requested
- Efficiency of curriculum to facilitate timely graduation
- Quality and efficiency of advising to ensure student success
- Allocation of resources to curriculum that ensures timely progression to degree
- Focus on Degree “Programs of Strategic Emphasis”
- Focus on teaching aligned with the mission of the university, including experiential learning and internships
- Implement structures supporting interdisciplinary collaboration

Graduate Education

One of Kennesaw State's key goals as an institution is to prepare our students for success in their chosen professions. In recent years, an increasing number of careers have required a graduate degree for entry into a field or for promotion and advancement within a field. Bureau of Labor Statistics data highlight the value of post-undergraduate degrees; median weekly earnings in 2017 increased from a bachelor's to a master's and again to a doctoral degree, from approximately \$1,200 a week to \$1,400 per week for a master's to over \$1,700 per week for individuals with a doctorate. Within high-demand professional fields, increases are even more significant. In addition, the unemployment rate has the inverse correlation, with graduate degrees offering significant economic protection from the adverse effects of unemployment.

In order to not only retain its R2 status, but also develop its renown as a graduate institution, Kennesaw State must ensure it continues to meet and exceed the minimum number of research doctorates conferred in a Carnegie sampling year. As part of our existing FPA and workload models, high expectations for faculty in terms of research and productivity should be clearly communicated in an effort to recruit, retain and develop faculty to ensure an exceptional experience for graduate students.

Resources should be strategically directed to research and degrees with meaningful results for students and the institution. The University, colleges, and academic departments should identify and support graduate education in areas of strategic emphasis. It should be the goal of faculty and staff within KSU to identify and pursue these areas prior to other institutions in order to maximize the opportunity. This will not only sustain, but advance, the University's national profile.

Recommended goals and strategies are provided below to increase and enhance graduate education at KSU. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and colleges are encouraged to tailor their goals to the unique needs of their disciplines.

- Increase in overall number of graduate students
- Strategies to expand enrollment in current targeted graduate programs
- Opportunities to create new graduate programs based on pre-existing strength within a unit or demonstrated current or future market need
- Opportunities to create linked bachelor/master programs within and across colleges
- Allocation of resources to graduate degree programs that meet pre-determined ROI metrics (e.g., degrees awarded, research support needs, community impacts)
- Effective promotion and outreach to recruit students and publicize the excellence of specific graduate programs

Research Productivity

Research, scholarship, and creative activity (RSCA) are clearly major components of the R2 status. Kennesaw State will need ambitious RSCA productivity goals to ascend among the top R2s in the nation. To be clear, all scholarship is included in KSU's concept of RSCA productivity. This includes scholarship from the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, business, computing, engineering, education and health.

Successful growth in RSCA productivity at KSU requires focus across two areas. First the university and colleges must identify ways to enhance the infrastructure to support our faculty members so they can focus on their scholarship. Second, key goals and metrics must be established at the college and university levels to identify key niche opportunities for investment and growth. This is an exciting opportunity for KSU to chart RSCA goals that align with its overall mission. As such, much of the research at KSU should reflect an applied perspective. KSU's scholarship should be able to demonstrate direct and positive impacts.

Recommended goals are provided below to increase and enhance RSCA productivity at Kennesaw State. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and colleges are encouraged to tailor their goals to the unique needs of their disciplines. Colleges are also reminded that they have the flexibility as a unit serving within an R2 institution to designate some units within their college as having an instructional and research focus and other units as having solely an instructional focus.

- Identification of strategic signature RSCA areas
- Increase in external funding for RSCA
- Establishment of formalized, productive relationships with key industry and governmental partners
- Increase in high-quality, peer-reviewed publications or juried events
- Increase in faculty citations in venues likely to advance the University's reputation
- Demonstration of resource allocation to support identified RSCA signature areas
- Robust support infrastructure to meet faculty needs for success

Conclusion

Kennesaw State University has clearly demonstrated that it is an exceptional university dedicated to the continued pursuit of high achievement. It is therefore within the lifeblood of this institution to reach for the highest goal, specifically to establish itself among the best R2 universities in the nation. This goal will require hard work, focus, and a can-do attitude. It will require setting goals that align with this mission, taking specific action to meet those goals, then measuring that success. It will require support from the entire university community and an understanding that every action being taken will make KSU that much better for its students.

The strategic vision and goals described above are well aligned with the strategic imperatives of the University System of Georgia and KSU's designation as a comprehensive university within the system. As such, in fulfilling this vision of becoming a top tier R2, we are meeting and exceeding the USG's mission for KSU.

Most importantly, KSU remains beloved and respected by its students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Kennesaw State already provides a premier education at a remarkably reasonable cost compared with other major universities in Georgia and beyond. These steps will enhance the overall experience and prestige at this great university. Owl Nation has a proud and storied history and will continue to ascend.