Beacon Creative

KU
Community, Involvement, Connection.
Engage

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Engagement Center (SEC) is a hub for student involvement, leadership development, impact services, resources, and community programs. A center within the Office of Student Affairs, the SEC is one of many services and departments that uphold the mission of Student Affairs — engage the KU community in services and programs that make learning possible.

In early September of 2024, the university announced a 'realignment' of campus services and organizations with the Students Involvement and Leadership Center (SILC) to create the Student Engagement Center. However, these services were not dismantled, and there were no positions eliminated. This move was done on recommendation from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Additionally, this was done at a time when efforts from the university to support students and staff of color and gender-diverse people were attacked by federal and state-level mandates, orders, and laws.

Since September, the SEC still provides, supports, and promotes all services and organizations that were offered prior to the realignment. Despite this, there are many misconceptions and confusion among students regarding the SEC. For example, many students that Beacon Creative interviewed or surveyed were under the impression that all or most 'centers' had been dissolved or had been replaced with something lesser. Additionally, the SEC's communication across its website, social media, and newsletter is convoluted and feels bureaucratic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to the Student Engagement Center's need to provide clear and concise messaging and branding, they also face the difficult challenge of fixing their narrative and building awareness.

Beyond branding and messaging, Beacon Creative recommends adopting a student-oriented brand voice across the website, social media, and in-person and physical activations. We also recommend using easy-to-use tools for designing and posting interactive messaging with a student-to-student focus.

This plansbook highlights key areas that we have identified for growth and opportunity across all platforms in order to: 1) increase awareness among our target audiences, 2) position the SEC as student-led for students, and 3) provide clear, concise, and consistent messaging on all platforms.

Beacon Creative hopes this playbook can provide strong insights and research to guide the SEC in bettering its brand image and making itself more known and accessible to students. By making communication clear and concise as a brand overall, the SEC has the opportunity to reach more students and grow involvement.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

SITUATION ANALYSIS - SWOT

The KU Student Engagement Center represents a strategic shift towards centralized student support, aligning with national trends. Addressing concerns about accessibility, advocacy, and program visibility will be critical to ensuring its success and maintaining student trust. By learning from best practices at peer institutions and refining its service model, the SEC can maximize its impact on student success and retention.

STRENGTHS

- A centralized student engagement hub enhances accessibility and streamlines services.
- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through integrated programming.
- Strong institutional backing and alignment with national student success trends.
- Broad range of leadership and co-curricular opportunities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Expanding digital engagement strategies to improve student access to resources.
- Strengthening partnerships with external organizations to enhance student support services.
- Addressing financial barriers through expanded financial aid and basic needs initiatives.
- Leveraging student feedback to refine programming and improve engagement.

WEAKNESSES

- Website and communication gaps cause confusion among students about available resources.
- Concerns regarding the dilution of advocacy efforts due to center consolidation.
- Limited awareness of the SEC's full range of services among students and faculty.

THREATS

- Competing social influences such as nightlife, Greek life, and external events divert student attention.
- Potential resistance from students and advocacy groups to the center's restructuring.
- Budget constraints impact the ability to expand programs and services.

To better tailor our strategy, we segmented our target audience into Primary and Secondary groups, moving away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. This allows us to develop distinct strategies to engage each audience segment effectively.

Our primary audience consists of students seeking ways to become more connected and involved on campus.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

For our primary audience, we are looking for undergraduate KU students between the ages of 18-24. Focusing on undergraduate students is key because they are the primary users of engagement opportunities on campus.

- Freshmen: High priority because they are most likely unaware of the student engagement center and its opportunities, and early engagement leads to long term retention.
- Seniors: While low priority they are important to target because of the career development opportunities including leadership programs.

INTERNATIONAL AND TRANSFER STUDENTS

Falling under the pressure of attending a new school, especially when coming from a different university or country, can be overwhelming. The Student Engagement Center provides a valuable opportunity for these students to receive extra guidance on campus involvement, helping them build connections and navigate their new environment more confidently.

The secondary audience is important, but not the primary focus of our efforts. While reaching these audiences can provide additional support and amplify the SEC's overall impact, our success is not dependent on their engagement. Engaging this group is considered an added benefit rather than a critical requirement.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

While the center offers limited opportunities for grad students such as mentorship and networking, the student engagement center staff has few graduate students working to make the space more inclusive.

GREEK-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

Students in Greek life are a tougher audience to engage because, in most cases, they are receiving those leadership, service, professional development through their house affiliation. Greek life students attending the SEC are considered more socially active and well connected students making them a secondary target.

SITUATION ANALYSIS - CHALLENGES

Since introducing the Student Engagement Center, several challenges have shaped its early development and perception. Understanding these complexities is essential to navigating the SEC's launch and establishing its long-term success.

THE NARRATIVE

Changing the belief among students that the Student Engagement Center is a result of downsizing, consolidation, and/or elimination of these impact services and departments. The Save Our Centers Movement has a strong following and presence on campus.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

Movement has a strong following and presence on campus. Political Climate: With ever-changing mandates, executive orders, and bills in Congress, there is confusion and concern for programs, affinity groups, and services within the SEC. Working around constantly changing rules can be difficult for long-term goals.

NO BASELINE

The SEC and its structure is a first of its kind for higher education within our region. There aren't best-practices with this structure to go off of. However, this gives KU the opportunity to set the standard.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

SECONDARY RESEARCH - CLIENT INFORMATION

The Student Engagement Center is a department within the Department of Student Affairs. The SEC acts as a student hub for involvement, leadership development, impact programs, resources, and community programs. Prior to the 2024-2025 academic year, these services were spread across campus and other departments. The decision to merge these services and programs into one unit came from guidance from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

The goal of the restructuring is to re-imagine facility usage and programming to better accommodate students and their evolving needs. In September of 2024, the Student Engagement Center was announced with the mergers.

Below is a list of services and organizations that are currently housed under pillars of the Student Engagement Center. The center must be open and welcoming to all students, while placing a particular focus on supporting students who identify with certain affinity groups. These groups include non-traditional students, queer and trans students, students of color, and women and femme-identifying individuals.

IMPACT SERVICES

- Campus Cupboard
- Pregnant and Parenting Resource Pantry
- Trans Closet
- Winter Clothing Closet

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Clubs/Organizations
- Workshops
- Leadership Development
- Pepsi Program

COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Educational Programming
  - Webinars and Lectures surrounding LGBTQ+, POC and Women/Femme related topics that are available to view on the SEC website
- Community Building Programming
  - Affinity Groups
- Well-Being Programming

SECONDARY RESEARCH - MARKET ANALYSIS

The landscape of student engagement in higher education is evolving to prioritize holistic development, leadership opportunities, and well-being initiatives. Universities nationwide are merging and restructuring student affairs programs to streamline services and enhance inclusivity. KU's Student Engagement Center (SEC) reflects this trend, consolidating multiple student service centers to create a centralized hub for student involvement, leadership, and community programs.

ENVIRONMENTAL OBSERVATIONS

KU's approach to student success has expanded beyond academics to include holistic support, retention, and well-being. The formation of the SEC in September 2024 through the merger of four student centers, the Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity (SGD), the Emily Taylor Center for Women and Gender Equity, the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA), and the Student Involvement and Leadership Center (SILC), aims to enhance student support services. However, the merger has faced criticism from the student group "Save Our Centers," which argues that consolidation limits advocacy roles.

KU's commitment to student success is evident in its adoption of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Learning and Development Outcomes. Additionally, data from KU AIRE indicates an increase in minority student enrollment from 19.3% in 2015 to 25.9% in 2024, highlighting the need for culturally relevant support services.

SECONDARY RESEARCH - MARKET TRENDS

The landscape of student engagement in higher education is evolving to prioritize holistic development, leadership opportunities, and well-being initiatives. Universities nationwide are merging and restructuring student affairs programs to streamline services and enhance inclusivity. KU's Student Engagement Center (SEC) reflects this trend, consolidating multiple student service centers to create a centralized hub for student involvement, leadership, and community programs.

MARKET TRENDS

- **Holistic Student Development**
  - Universities emphasize leadership, mental health, and community engagement. This has followed the trend of universities moving away from acting as a "temporary guardian" (in loco parentis) to a student-centered model.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives**
  - Rising minority enrollment underscores the need for inclusive programs. Universities are responding in the following ways: the University of Michigan and Northeastern have chosen to neutralize their language, West Virginia University and the University of Utah are restructuring and rebranding their programs, and Amherst College has chosen not to comply with DEI changes and believes their current policies are compliant with federal law.
- **Technology-Driven Engagement**
  - Online platforms and virtual programming increase accessibility to student services.
- **Retention and Support Services**
  - Institutions focus on financial aid, food security, and emergency assistance.
- **Experiential Learning & Career Readiness**
  - Hands-on learning, internships, and co-curricular involvement are increasingly prioritized.

MARKET SIZE AND GROWTH

The sector for student engagement is growing, with institutions investing in inclusive student support and leadership development. The SEC's restructuring aligns with national trends, though its success will depend on addressing concerns regarding advocacy and accessibility.

In response to the growing wave of anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) legislation expected to take effect by 2025, colleges and universities across the country are adopting a range of strategies. Some institutions are complying with new regulations by adjusting policies, language, and administrative structures, while others are choosing to resist or reframe their DEI efforts. These responses generally fall into three categories: compliance, restructuring and rebranding, and resistance or non-compliance. Below are examples of how various universities are navigating these challenges.

COMPLIANCE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The University of Michigan has adopted a policy of "institutional neutrality". In doing so, they have removed diversity statements from their websites and hiring processes. Additionally, they have barred administrators from making political statements.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

West Virginia University eliminated its Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and created the Division of Campus Engagement and Compliance. The new division focuses on meeting requirements under Title IX and the Americans with Disabilities Act, aligning with new federal and state guidelines. WVU stated that this change is not a rebranding but a shift in focus to ensure compliance with recent executive orders. The university is also reviewing internal practices and providing unit-level guidance to support full compliance.

RESTRUCTURING AND REBRANDING

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Northeastern University replaced the website for its Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion with a simplified page titled "Belonging at Northeastern" and announced plans to replace the office with a new "Office of Belonging." Although the administration maintains that the university's core values of fostering diversity and inclusion remain unchanged, it acknowledges that the methods used to achieve these goals may need to evolve to remain compliant with legal requirements. Under the looming threat of federal examination, Northeastern has replaced or dismantled much of its previous DEI messaging and online presence.

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

The University of Utah closed its Division of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, along with several cultural centers. Resources were shifted to create a new Community and Cultural Engagement Center. Some existing centers were also renamed, such as the American Indian Resource Center, which is now called The Center for Native Excellence and Tribal Engagement.

RESISTANCE AND NONCOMPLIANCE

AMHERST COLLEGE
Amherst College does not plan to change its existing DEI policies, stating that they are already compliant with federal law. The college is consulting with legal counsel to prepare for any potential challenges.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Harvard University rejected demands from the Trump administration to end its DEI programs and to screen international students for ideological concerns. The university also filed a lawsuit against the administration over the freezing of federal grant funding.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The Big 10 Pact was launched by faculty at Rutgers University and Indiana University Bloomington by passing a resolution to form a collective agreement among all 18 Big Ten institutions. The pact is designed to create a unified front where member universities support one another in resisting anti-DEI efforts. The goal is to preserve diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by sharing resources, legal strategies, and public messaging, strengthening the institutions' ability to respond to external pressures at both state and federal levels.

The Education for All Initiative is a grassroots coalition led by community college administrators across the country. This group focuses on advising institutions on how to resist anti-DEI legislation while continuing to support inclusive practices. The initiative provides colleges and universities with training sessions, legal guidance, strategic resources, and best practices to maintain their commitment to diversity and belonging, even in restrictive legislative environments.

IMPORTANCE OF AFFINITY GROUPS AND SERVICES

In their current form, affinity groups at colleges and universities started in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. They were a space for marginalized groups and communities to stay connected with each other, organize, and learn skills from one another.
Today, these groups and services still provide a space to connect, organize, and learn, but they are also providing impact services to support ever-changing needs of students.

The University of Kansas faces competition from other universities that offer similar student engagement models, each striving to create environments that foster student involvement, growth, and connection. These institutions have developed programs designed to support various aspects of student life, from mentorship and networking to leadership development and extracurricular activities. Key competitors in this space include:

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

The University of Missouri implemented a Social Change Model to guide leadership development and large-scale community service programs. Offers 10 different service initiatives open to all students. Advises the student government to ensure the center remains student-led. However, the Office of Student Engagement website contains a few broken links, which can mislead or frustrate visitors

Examples of Different Services MU Provides:
- Truman's Closet: Students can borrow business attire for career fairs, interviews, and the workplace.
- Tiger Pantry: Assists students and faculty that may be facing food insecurity by providing a food pantry for anyone to enjoy.
- Mizzou Education Bank: Provides textbooks, school supplies, and additional academic resources to the Mizzou student body.
- Caring for Columbia: One-day event led by students, for students to get involved with local services.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

All of Kansas State University's centers of similar programming is spread out across the campus in different buildings and offices. The different centers offer student engagement services, service learning programs, LGBTQ+ resources, and an on-campus grocery store.

- Rural Grocery Initiative: aims to strengthen locally owned grocery stores to boost community involvement and better access to healthy food. By sharing resources that support local grocers, students will have easier access to food.
- Community partners: Kansas Sampler Foundation, Kansas Rural center, Center for Rural affairs, USDA rural development, and the Kansas Department of Commerce.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA - LINCOLN

The University of Nebraska has over 540 recognized student organizations, ensuring to find leadership and community building opportunities that better match a student's interest. Under their own version of the SEC, the Student Leadership, Involvement and Community Engagement Center, hey offer unique models like the "Weekender" and "Engage Lincoln". The Weekender highlights money-saving, student-focused social events happening at the University of Nebraska campus. Engage Lincoln is a nonprofit organization that addresses community needs, each day focusing on a different nonprofit organization. Students have the opportunity to volunteer and address community needs.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

While Iowa doesn't have one center that serves all student needs, they have over 500 student organization programs to stay connected on campus. They offer similar services, such as their food pantry and LGBTQ+ center offering inclusion.

- Their food pantry offers free nutritious food for University of Iowa students, ranging from fresh produce to toiletries. The food pantry is open from Tuesday through Friday, located at the Iowa Memorial Union.
- The Pride Alliance Center was created in 2005, securing a safe center for the LGBTQ+ community. The center provides intra- and cross-cultural education for students to enjoy.
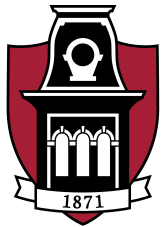
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Iowa State offers over 300 student organizations, leadership programs, and service opportunities. They have "The SHOP" pantry and a Center for LGBTQIA+ Student Success. Their website was somewhat misleading, with multiple Iowa State pages either repeating the same information or displaying outdated content.

- The SHOP is a student-run, on-campus food pantry that aims to eliminate food insecurity. They serve the student community by raising hunger awareness and food insecurity on all platforms.
- The Center is a service provided where students can learn and engage to support their wellbeing. The center has been moved around in the past years, but it is now located in the school's Memorial Union.

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Arkansas: Focuses on service learning, food pantries, and Safe Zone LGBTQ+ initiatives. Their vision is to offer collaborative experiences with the students and the community through a variety of services. They establish three core values: Relationship-focused, Student-Driven, and Service-Minded providing an efficient framework for ethical behavior. They offer unique services/programs such as the work it off program and the full circle food pantry.

- Work It Off: Partners the University's Transit and Parking department and The Center for Community Engagement where students perform community service activities to cover the costs of a parking ticket.
- Full Circle Food Pantry: Student-led emergency food assistance program, serving clients with balanced meals from produce in their own garden. They provide a three day supply of groceries and personal care items up to three times a week.

SECONDARY RESEARCH - COMPETITION INSIGHTS

KEY INSIGHTS

The University of Missouri uses a "social change model" that promotes leadership development. KU could develop similar models to make leadership development more accessible.

Iowa State offers more than 800 programs offering volume over quality. KU might focus on visibility and quality rather than just expanding.

Besides the University of Iowa and Missouri, all the other schools had either outdated URLs or difficult to navigate websites.

All the compared universities place strong emphasis on the "student led" aspect of their programs. While KU also offers student-led initiatives, it isn't highlighted as much as other schools.

LOOKING AT STUDENT NUMBERS

26,887 Graduate & Undergraduate Students (Lawrence Campus)

Female
52.6%

Male
47.2%

Freshman to Sophomore Retention Rate **86.5%**

Data from 2015 indicates that over half of college students worry about paying for college, and **60%** worry about regular expenses. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of college students struggle with food insecurity. Students of color make up **32%** of the KU student body.

SECONDARY RESEARCH - BEST PRACTICES

On a wider scale nationwide, looking at peer institutions gives us valuable understanding and knowledge of how to better support students.

SIERRA COLLEGE

Sierra College offers three distinct centers: the Cross-Cultural Center, Pride Center, and Women and Gender Resource Center. The Cross-Cultural Center provides event spaces, specialized rooms for programs like Puente and Umoja, an Undocumented Student Center, and a welcoming multicultural environment. The Pride Center serves as a safe space for LGBTQ+ students to study, relax, and access media resources, while also hosting community events. The Women and Gender Resource Center offers personal care items for all students and dedicated support for student parents.

COLORADO COLLEGE

Colorado College's HAVEN to anti-DEI legislation offers important context for the current environment in higher education and provides examples of how institutions are navigating these challenges. The Healing and Affirming Village and Empowerment Network, or HAVEN, is for students transferring to Colorado College from states with anti-DEI legislation. This program offers students who are transferring from these states full financial aid consideration and full credit transfer. Additionally, students are guaranteed housing, and support services like counseling and identity-affirming care will give special attention to these students.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SURVEY

In an attempt to reach a large amount of KU students, Beacon Creative launched the survey on a variety of digital platforms. We shared the survey on our staff's LinkedIn accounts as well as on other personal social media accounts to get responses from our immediate networks. To further expand our reach, we shared the survey link in large student group chats and asked professors of various schools to share the survey with their students. Additionally, we printed a flyer with a scannable QR code and posted it around campus.

Our distribution methods allowed us to reach students in different years, majors, and backgrounds. Of the 127 students who opened the survey, 97 completed all survey questions, yielding % completion rate of 76.38%. The survey evaluated awareness of the Student Engagement Center, access to campus resources, and perceptions of the recent realignment.
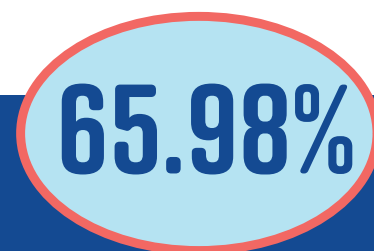
Below are key insights that our team has pulled from our survey.

60.82%
Students who were not aware of the SEC's formation

5.15%
Students who were familiar with the SEC

65.98%
Students who did not know where the SEC was located on campus

Survey results reveal significant gaps in **general awareness** about the Student Engagement Center among the student body. A majority, 60.82%, of students reported being unaware that the SEC had even been established. Only a small fraction, 5.15%, felt familiar with the center, suggesting that current marketing and communication efforts have not yet successfully reached or engaged the broader campus community. Additionally, 65.98% of students did not know where the SEC is located, further indicating a critical need for stronger visibility and outreach strategies.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SURVEY

Among students who were aware of the merger, 61.86% felt that student voices were not considered in the realignment process. This perception suggests a disconnect between administrative decisions and student engagement, which may contribute to feelings of exclusion or dissatisfaction. Additionally, 38.14% of students said the merger made them feel less connected to KU.

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES FROM STUDENTS INVOLVED WITH THE SEC PRIOR TO THE REALIGNMENT

"As an off campus student who works full time, I used to be able to attend events and/or utilize resources outside of my working hours and now I just can't".

"I feel like KU doesn't care at all about the queer community or the needs of women/femmes on campus. We had no input or warning about the changes and it feels like we're being erased".

"[There is] no more specialization of care towards certain minority groups. Center is much less advertised and the whole thing reads as preemptive compliance and erasure of our history as an institution".

"Little to no remaining event programming, lots of usual weekly, monthly, and annual events just disappeared. Lack of resources for clubs & difficulties contacting SEC for assistance (Pepsi Committee, OMA room reservation, etc.)".

Most of the open-ended responses reflected a general sentiment of negativity, with many students expressing concerns that the merger had negatively impacted resources, support services, and their sense of belonging on campus. However, a smaller number of students acknowledged that the merger was likely a response to legislative pressures, recognizing that the changes may have been made out of necessity rather than choice.

Student feedback about the SEC reveals a perception that, while the center may be functioning as intended, it lacks a strong emotional or memorable presence on campus. The graphic below showcases student sentiments when asked to use one word to describe the SEC, whether that's their feelings or the overall experience.

Frustrated Apathetic Welcomed
Alienated Disengaged Supported Pitiful
Great Misunderstood Unrepresented
Ignored Efficient Inadequate Supported
Unnecessary Secure Disregarded Detached
Included Unimportant
Indifferent

Many students expressed feelings of indifference or frustration, using words like "ignored" and "apathetic" to describe their experience. At the same time, a small number did report feeling "welcomed" and "supported," indicating that experiences with the SEC vary widely. Overall, the tone of the responses points to a clear disconnect between the center's purpose and its impact

As the SEC aims to support a diverse range of students through its programming, it is especially important to consider how key demographic and psychographic groups are experiencing its presence and impact. Data suggests that some of the very students the center seeks to uplift, particularly female-identifying students, LGBTQ+ individuals and those from multicultural backgrounds, have felt the most negatively affected by the recent merger. These students reported a noticeable decline in their sense of belonging, often citing a loss of dedicated spaces, resources, and visible community support. The following section explores these patterns in more depth.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SURVEY

Survey results indicate varying levels of satisfaction and needs met across different demographic groups. Some groups reported higher satisfaction and felt their needs were better met, while others, particularly non-binary and "Other"-identified students, expressed feelings of frustration and alienation. These findings suggest a need for more targeted resources and support to ensure that all students feel included and their unique needs are addressed.
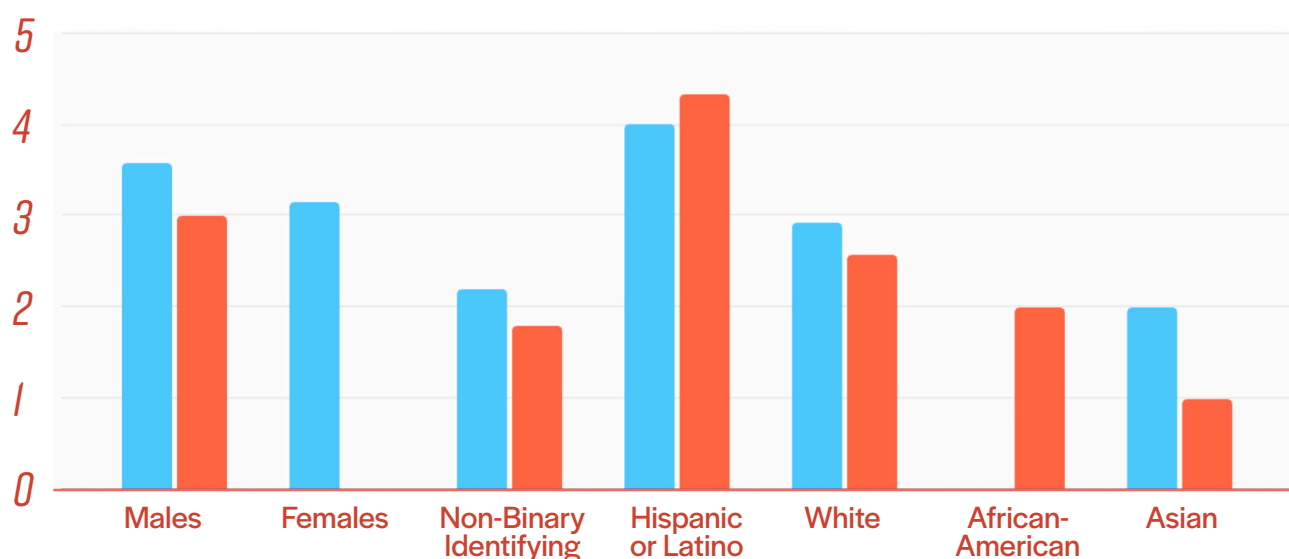

DEMOGRAPHIC TAKEAWAYS

- Female identifying students felt most negatively about their sense of belonging post merger.
- Out of 16 respondents who identified of the LGBTQ+ community, 14 of them said that their sense of belonging was negatively impacted by the merger
- Open-ended responses suggest marginalized student groups (LGBTQ, multi-cultural students) felt a loss of dedicated support and community visibility.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SURVEY

Zooming out from specific identity groups, the broader student population also reveals important patterns in engagement with the SEC. While the center is designed to serve all KU students, usage remains relatively low, and most students are learning about its services indirectly rather than through intentional outreach. Overall satisfaction levels indicate a neutral to mildly positive experience, with similar responses around ease of use and reliability.

25.77%
Students who recalled utilizing a SEC service or program

PEERS AND PROFESSORS
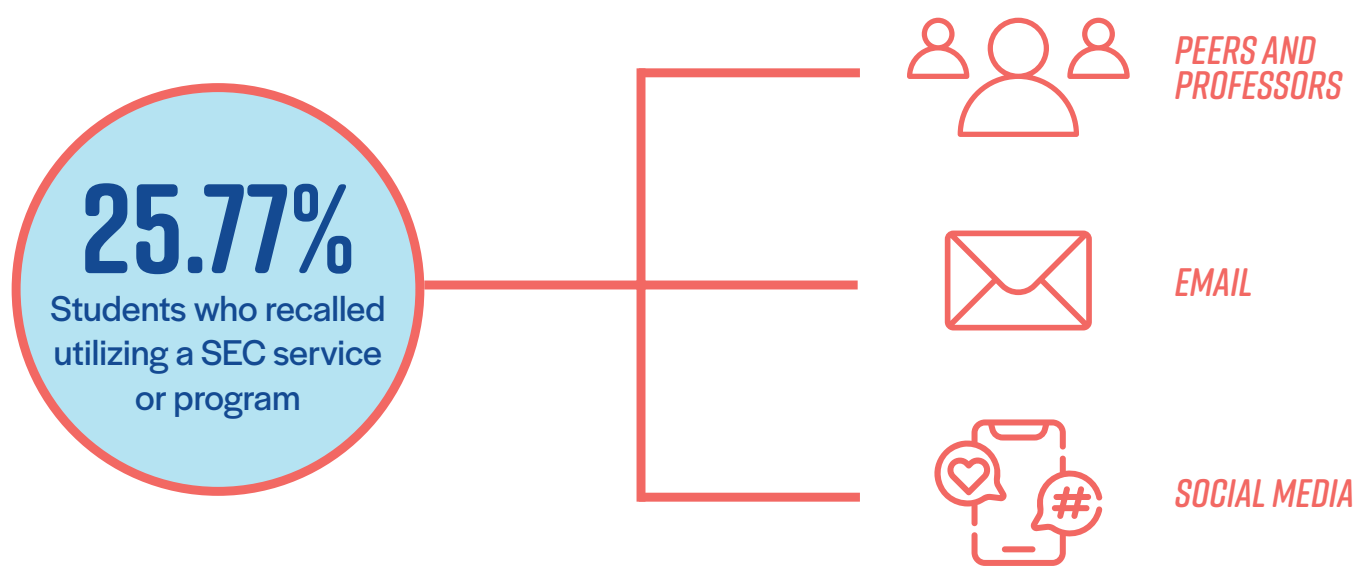
EMAIL

SOCIAL MEDIA

Students who utilized a Student Engagement Center service most commonly discovered it through word of mouth, whether from peers or professors, followed closely by email communications and social media. Other notable sources included the KU website and physical posters around campus. Interestingly, only four students reported learning about SEC services through their academic advisors, indicating a key opportunity for improved collaboration and outreach in that area.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SURVEY

The survey results point to a clear gap between the SEC's intended purpose and how it is currently perceived by students. Many respondents were unsure of what the SEC is, where it's located, or what services it provides—signaling major gaps in communication and visibility. This disconnect is especially pronounced among students from marginalized communities, who reported feeling unheard or unsupported since the merger. While individual centers like the Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity were more widely recognized, they were rarely associated with the SEC as a whole. Overall, the data emphasizes the need for stronger branding, clearer messaging, and more intentional outreach to ensure the SEC is seen as an accessible, inclusive hub for student engagement.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The core takeaway from our survey research is 'disconnect,' as students across various groups reported a lack of alignment between their expectations and the available campus services.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - INTERVIEWS

To gain a more well-rounded understanding of student perspectives on the Student Engagement Center, we spoke with students from a variety of backgrounds, involvement levels, and areas of study at KU. Our goal was to capture a spectrum of insights—ranging from those who were deeply familiar with the SEC to those who had never heard of it. By gathering feedback from students with different levels of engagement, we aimed to uncover how the SEC is perceived, what students expect from it, and how it can better serve and communicate with the KU community.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Many students perceive the name "Student Engagement Center" as vague and bureaucratic. "Something out of Strong Hall".
- The initial announcement was very formal and abrupt. Students felt left out and uninformed.
- Students appreciate infographics and event updates but criticize the current design for being visually chaotic and lacking authentic content like real event photos.
- Students want peer-led organizations and communication — including student-run social media, student ambassadors, and student representation at town halls.
- There's a strong call for broader representation across different schools and groups — not just the "usual faces."
- Students engage more when content is relatable, adds educational value, or promotes student-generated content and pop culture tie-ins.
- Students are drawn to spaces where they can relax, eat, and hang with friends—these hubs become natural centers of engagement.

Overall, students are seeking a more authentic, accessible, and student-driven approach to the Student Engagement Center: one that feels personal, visually cohesive and built around real connection rather than formal announcements or institutional tone.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - INTERVIEWS

From our interview results, our team found feedback that reveals key insights on student awareness of SEC services, preferred communication methods, strategies for increasing engagement, and concerns about losing tailored support for specific communities.

CONFUSION
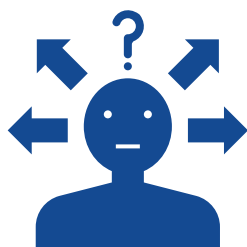
Though the SEC offers many valuable services, many students don't know what it does.
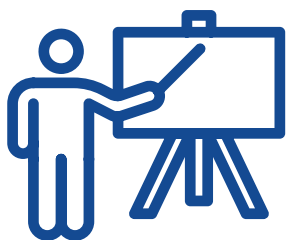
CAMPUS COMMUNICATION
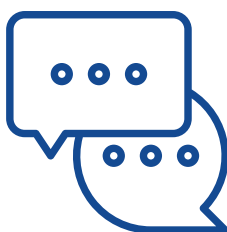
The most effective modes of communication for campus organizations are Instagram, posters, sidewalk chalk and word-of-mouth.

PRESENCE

Students suggest more on-campus pop-ups and a visible ambassador program to make SEC more present in everyday student life.

FACULTY INTEREST

Professors who create a sense of belonging and share passion for causes significantly boost student involvement.

STUDENT WORRIES

Students are worried about losing the unique cultures and tailored support that prior individual centers (e.g., gender/sexuality centers) offered.

PERSONAS

BACKGROUND

Sam is a 19-year-old, male-identifying, hardworking out-of-state student juggling a part-time job at KU Dining and support from his parents. He values financial independence and is exploring a future in medicine, debating between Pre-Med or research. His busy schedule makes it hard to meet new people or attend social events, and he sometimes feels homesick. Still, he's interested in joining clubs and study groups to connect and make the most of college.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Majoring in Microbiology

Part-time income

Out-of-State Student

Employed by KU Dining

IDENTIFIERS

- Introverted
- Busy Schedule
- Homesick, Still Seeking Belonging
- Stays Connected via Social Media
- Gets News from Instagram and Tiktok

CHALLENGES AND PAIN POINTS

- Struggles with limited free time
- Often unaware of campus events or opportunities until it's too late
- Finds it difficult to fully engage in campus life
- Has trouble building new connections due to timing and awareness barriers

GOALS

- Prioritizes academic success and financial independence
- Aims to balance work, school, and personal life
- Hopes to avoid student debt while still enjoying a fulfilling college experience

WHAT WE CAN DO

- Position the SEC as a low-stakes space for connection
- Offer "Study with Me" nights or communal meals to fit his schedule
- Highlight academic and financial support services
- Promote events on Instagram Reels and TikTok

BACKGROUND

Riley is a 24-year-old, queer, female-identifying nontraditional student who transferred to KU after a COVID-related academic pause. She works part-time at the Jazzhaus, lives off-campus, and often feels disconnected from younger peers. While she's aware of the SEC, she finds its identity-affirming spaces less visible and accessible since the realignment. Determined to finish her degree, Riley is independent but feels the weight of navigating university systems on her own.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Majoring in Psychology

Part-time income

In-State Student

Employed by Jazzhaus

IDENTIFIERS

- Extroverted
- Skeptical of Performative Diversity
- Engages with Inclusive Student Organizations
- Intentional With Her Actions, i.e. Online Following

GOALS

- Access support systems that affirm her identity and provide stability
- Re-engage with campus life and build connections with like-minded peers
- Contribute to meaningful, lasting change within the KU community
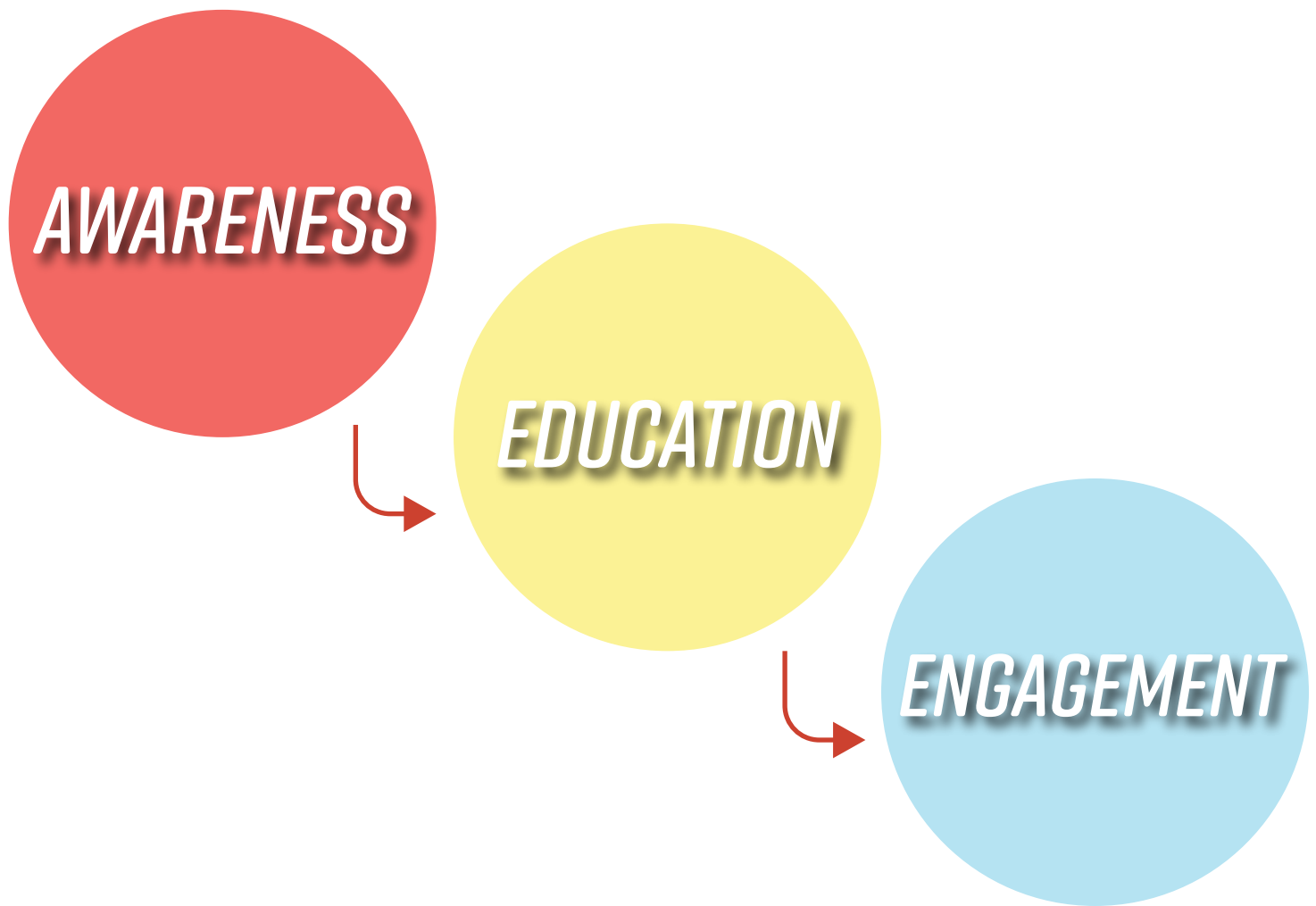
CHALLENGES AND PAIN POINTS

- Feels disconnected from traditional student culture
- Unsure where to find LGBTQ+ or nontraditional student support in the new SEC structure
- Skeptical of the SEC realignment
- Struggles to trust the current resources

WHAT WE CAN DO

- Lead with clear objectives that address Riley's specific needs
- Highlight resources tailored to students like her
- Share authentic student stories on social media to rebuild trust
- Increase visibility of support services through real-world examples

PLANNING

Based on our research and collaborative brainstorming, Beacon Creative believes the most effective way to improve the Student Engagement Center moving forward is by approaching it through the lens of the audience journey. Like any brand experience, people move through phases of awareness, education, and engagement. When it comes to the SEC, the greatest challenge lies in simply getting students to the first step: awareness. Our strategy is built around guiding students along this journey — helping them not only discover the SEC but also understand its purpose and ultimately feel compelled to engage with it in meaningful ways.

AWARENESS

EDUCATION

ENGAGEMENT

GOAL 1:
Increase awareness of the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 1:
By the end of the Fall 2025 semester, ensure that at least 90% of academic schools at KU have visible SEC presence through digital and physical promotion efforts.

STRATEGY 1:
Increase both physical and digital resource distribution to Communications Coordinators across KU's academic schools to build consistent SEC awareness.

TACTIC 1:
Design, print, and hang informational flyers in each academic building.

TACTIC 2:
Reach out to Communications Coordinators to request regular inclusion of SEC events in their weekly or monthly newsletters.

PLANNING - GOAL 1: AWARENESS

GOAL 1:
Increase awareness of the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 1:
By the end of the Fall 2025 semester, ensure that at least 90% of academic schools at KU have visible SEC presence through digital and physical promotion efforts.

STRATEGY 2:
Emphasize partnership visibility by collaborating with academic programs and student organizations to expand SEC's reach across diverse student groups.

TACTIC 1:
Plan and execute events or workshops in collaboration with academic departments or student orgs.

TACTIC 2:
Coordinate with partner programs to include SEC information in newsletters, email blasts, or Canvas announcements throughout the semester.

TACTIC 3:
Launch at least three joint social media campaigns with partner accounts to promote events, opportunities, or student highlights.

FITNESS FUNDAMENTALS WITH FEMMES

Learn to use strength and cardio machines in a private, body positive and judgement-free environment with other women and femmes!

All bodies, identities and heritages are welcome!

Please contact Miranda Kolenda at mkolenda@ku.edu or Cornelius Baker at c.baker@ku.edu with questions.

GOAL 1:
Increase awareness of the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 2:
Ensure 100% of SEC materials—both digital and print—adhere to consistent brand guidelines by Fall 2025 to improve recognition and strengthen identity.

STRATEGY 1:
Establish a strong and recognizable brand identity for the Student Engagement Center.
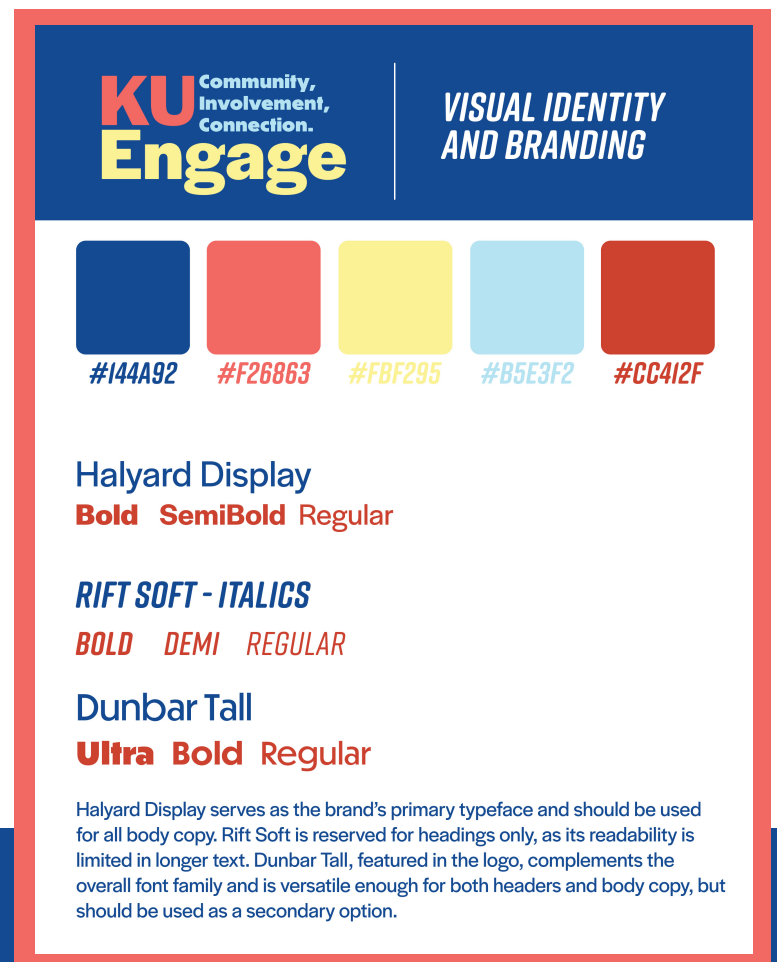
TACTIC 1:
Design a comprehensive SEC brand package that defines color palettes, typography, and logo usage.

TACTIC 2:
Rename the Student Engagement Center to KU Engage to position it as a campus-wide initiative rather than just a physical location.

TACTIC 3:
Develop a style guide to promote inclusive, accessible, and consistent messaging across all platforms.

KU Engage
Community, Involvement, Connection.

VISUAL IDENTITY AND BRANDING

#144A92   #F26863   #FBF295   #B5E3F2   #CC412F

Halyard Display
Bold   **SemiBold**   Regular

RIFT SOFT - ITALICS
BOLD   DEMI   REGULAR

Dunbar Tall
Ultra   **Bold**   Regular

Halyard Display serves as the brand's primary typeface and should be used for all body copy. Rift Soft is reserved for headings only, as its readability is limited in longer text. Dunbar Tall, featured in the logo, complements the overall font family and is versatile enough for both headers and body copy, but should be used as a secondary option.

GOAL 1:
Increase awareness of the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 3:
Increase online visibility and brand recognition of the SEC by 30% in impressions and reach by December 2025.

STRATEGY 1:
Build a more dynamic and consistent social media presence that resonates with the student body, faculty and campus partners.

TACTIC 1:
Hire a Student Communications Assistant with a background in social media and design.

TACTIC 2:
Purchase a DSLR camera to capture more events and behind-the-scenes content.

TACTIC 3:
Purchase a DSLR camera to capture more events and behind-the-scenes content

TACTIC 4:
Create a social media calendar using Sprout Social for organizational purposes

TACTIC 5:
Provide easy-to-use branded social media templates for both the Student Communications Assistant and faculty, ensuring consistency and ease in creating on-brand communications

GOAL 1:

Increase awareness of the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 4:

Increase on campus visibility and engagement by achieving a 25% increase in event attendance through consistent brand signage.

STRATEGY 1:

Enhance the Student Engagement Center's on-campus visibility and physical presence.

TACTIC 1:

Install KU Engage signage on the exterior of Sabatini Multicultural Resource Center.

TACTIC 2:

Use on-campus display spaces (poster boards, digital screens, and bulletin boards) to share weekly events with the KU Engage logo prominently displayed.

TACTIC 3:

Enhance physical spaces with KU Engage branded decorations to create a welcoming and recognizable environment.

GOAL 2:
Increase understanding and familiarity of services and resources offered by the Student Engagement Center amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 1:
Increase student understanding of the SEC by 25% before the end of the fall 2025 semester, measured against the initial research survey and a follow-up survey in December of 2025.

STRATEGY 2:
Distribute accessible educational materials across all schools and high-traffic areas around campus.

TACTIC 1:
Create printed brochures outlining KU Engage services and programs to be used at KU Engage workshops, tabling at events such as Union Fest and Crimson and Blue Days and more.

TACTIC 2:
Table in high-traffic areas to hand out materials and answer student questions (Wescoe, the Rec, etc.)

PLANNING - GOAL 2: EDUCATION

GOAL 2:
Increase understanding and familiarity of services and resources offered by the Student Engagement Center/KU Engage amongst our target audiences currently enrolled at KU's Lawrence campus.

OBJECTIVE 1:
Increase student understanding of the SEC/KU Engage by 25% before the end of the fall 2025 semester, measured against the initial research survey and a follow-up survey in December of 2025.

STRATEGY 2:
Establish key student liaisons within each academic school to promote KU Engage services.

TACTIC 1:

Recruit and train KU Engage Student Ambassadors

TACTIC 2:

Host school-specific info sessions and mini-seminars about KU Engage programming

GOAL 3:
Boost active student participation with the student engagement center by encouragin participation in programs and events among KU undergrads.

OBJECTIVE 1:
By December 2025, the SEC will implement a feedback system where at least 75% of all SEC-hosted events and student-led initiatives include a feedback survey or form.

STRATEGY 1:
Create a "You Said, We Did" Feedback System

TACTIC 1:
Use SEC social media channels to promote adjustments and improvements made based on student feedback.

TACTIC 2:
Highlight individual student voices to show that feedback is valued and acted upon via spotlights on social media.

TACTIC 3:
Develop a short infographic or newsletter after major events summarizing top feedback points and actions taken.

Would you be willing to be featured on the KU Engage Instagram and Website for a testimonial of your experience using our services?

If so, please provide us with your First and Last name, as well as your KU email. **If NOT,** leave the these entries blank.

First Name & Last Name

KU Email

→

PLANNING - GOAL 3: ENGAGEMENT

GOAL 3:
Boost active student participation with the student engagement center by encouragin participation in programs and events among KU undergrads.

OBJECTIVE 2:
Recruit and initiate a student volunteer committee composed of at least 10 students by the end of the fall semester

STRATEGY 1:
Hold monthly volunteer meetings as an opportunity for students to meet with both likeminded peers and KU Engage faculty.

TACTIC 1:
Launch a volunteer sign-up system as an opportunity for students to get involved on campus and be apart of KU Engage leadership.

TACTIC 2:
Assign a theme for each meeting, such as event planning, strategy brainstorming, or feedback review.

TACTIC 3:
Keep an ongoing record of meeting notes and progress on committee initiatives.

JOIN OUR VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE

- Develop leadership skills
- Make a difference on campus
- Meet other student volunteers

SIGN UP TODAY!

KU Engage
Community, Involvement, Connection.

GOAL 3:
Boost active student participation with the student engagement center by encouragin participation in programs and events among KU undergrads.

OBJECTIVE 3:
Increase student attendance at SEC events by 30% in the fall 2025 semester through different communication channels.

STRATEGY 1:
Launch a centralized digital calendar accessible from all KU Engage communications channels.

TACTIC 1:
Maintain a consistent, updated digital calendar page embedded into the KU Engage website that lists all upcoming events, workshops, and volunteer opportunities.

TACTIC 2:
Update the calendar on a weekly to monthly basis to ensure event information remains accurate and current.

TACTIC 3:
Promote the calendar regularly through SEC social media channels and email newsletters to drive student usage and awareness.
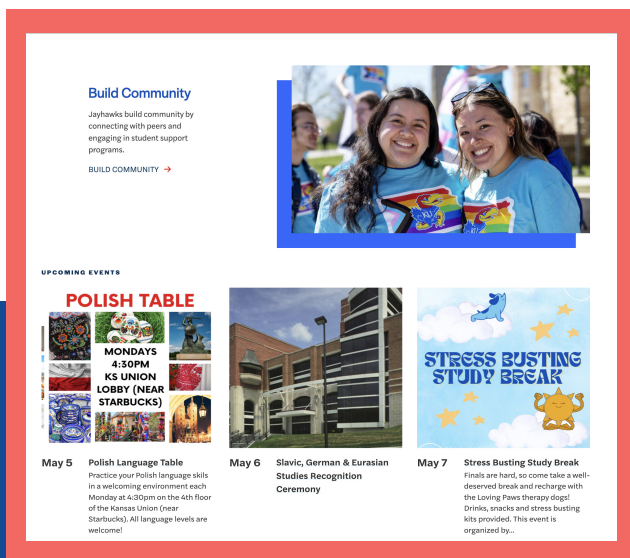
BUDGET

BUDGET

MONTHLY BUDGET ALLOCATION

Item	Monthly Cost
Student Communications Assistant (Monthly)	$480.00
Adobe Creative Cloud (Yearly)	$89.99
Sprout Social (Monthly)	$199.00
Beacons (Monthly)	$10.00
Rebrand.ly (Monthly)	$32.00
Camera (One Time)	$429.00
Vinyl Decals (One Time)	$762.21
Yard Signs (One Time)	$289.70
Table Cover (One Time)	$115.00
Posters for Standing Signs (Monthly)	$50.00
Flyers (Monthly)	$40.00
TOTAL BUDGET	**$2,496.90**

This first-month budget totals **$2,496.90** and includes a mix of recurring and one-time expenses to support the launch of Student Engagement Center (SEC) outreach efforts. Staffing costs for the Student Communications Assistant are based on KU's maximum allowed student work hours and reflect average on-campus pay. Some tools, such as Adobe Creative Cloud and Sprout Social, are ongoing subscriptions, while others like the camera, signage, and table cover are one-time purchases meant to establish a long-term presence.

The recommended camera is the **Canon EOS 4000D / Rebel T100 DSLR** bundle (renewed), available on Amazon. It includes a zoom lens, 64GB memory, tripod, case, flash, and more—making it a cost-effective option for content creation. **Vinyl decals and yard signs** are quoted through *FastSigns*, where KU's tax-exempt status may help reduce costs. **Flyers and posters**, however, will be printed through *Jayhawk Ink* in the Kansas Union, offering a convenient on-campus option for recurring promotional materials.

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