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*Higher education has always been inextricably intertwined with the larger purposes of American society. Today, societal changes have produced college campuses which look very different from the colleges of a half century before. The student body is diverse—the traditional student is no longer the norm. Students and an equally diverse faculty bring a whole new set of imperatives which must be addressed by institutions of higher education. To meet these new demands, Kennesaw State College adopted an invitational approach in an effort to create an environment which encourages and affirms students, faculty, staff and administrators.*

# In Search of Strategies that Invite Success

Since its founding in 1963, Kennesaw State College has evolved from a relatively small junior college to become a comprehensive senior regional institution. Named for three consecutive years by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the South's "up-and-coming" regional colleges and universities, the college has employed strategies which have enabled it to accommodate change while creating a dynamic learning environment. The strategies pursued form a blueprint and may be instructive for other institutions faced with shifts in the number and the type of student served, as well as the resources available to meet those changes.

In 1981 Kennesaw State College was at a crossroads. Some two decades before, its primary student population consisted of a rather homogeneous group, but the college now served a largely nontraditional and increasingly diverse student population. To build a contemporary college for contemporary students a new approach was needed which could produce a change in mission and a shift in the environment.

Though programs were already in place to facilitate the success of KSC students, research revealed that these resources remained largely untapped or were short sighted. The college had a relatively low retention rate, suggesting that many students had not developed a strong commitment to the college. Campus life was at a minimum. This was a "PCP college" — our students moved from the parking lot to the classroom and back to the parking lot. While Kennesaw had made the transition in 1978 from a junior college to a senior college, in many ways it had retained many of the characteristics of the former.

As a first step, a plan was devised to move the college into a new posture by which a spirit of teamwork was fostered between faculty and staff. We embraced an initiative known as the "View of the Future" project to develop a new shared vision of goals for the college. Warren Bennis

points out that one of the marks of successful leaders is the ability to enroll others in their visions (pp. 155-172). It was through this project that we invited all sectors of the campus community to participate in the change process, focusing as a guiding principle on the connectedness across discipline lines and lines of staff and administrative responsibility.

The year-long "View of the Future" study identified behaviors and policies at Kennesaw State that were "unintentionally disinviting," to our students, i.e. that made students and other campus members feel unwelcome or uncomfortable and, thus hindered institutional success. These elements ranged from small matters such as inadequate campus signs to more significant concerns about poor advisement procedures. It became clear that many of our students, especially non-traditional students who attended classes in the evening, felt disassociated from mainstream college life. It was apparent that due to its rapidly growing student body KSC was in danger of becoming impersonal and losing the intimacy and the warmth associated with a small college.

Out of this study emerged numerous positive and negative indicators relating to campus life at Kennesaw State. Additionally, it was apparent that factors existed within the ranks of the faculty, staff and administration which functioned to promote or retard the progress of the college. It was apparent that effectively dealing with these political, societal, and economic forces required a willingness on the part of the college to promote change and to look for new ways of coping. Faced with the prospect of "doing more with less," we needed a new perspective to facilitate the tactics and strategies essential for institutional success.

After considering the results of our initial study and studying the efficacy of the various models to our priorities, we elected to adopt an **invitational approach**. Using this model we re-examined our mission and our service to students in positive ways as well as studying the college structure for ways to create an administration that was facilitative and empowering. Of great importance was the shift to embrace the community as an extension of our halls, recognizing that our service area did not end at the campus property lines.

As a co-founder, along with William Purkey, of the International Alliance for Invitational Education, I had long been committed to adapting the principles of invitational education to the college setting. This approach enables the organization to alter the environment so that it will intentionally summon students to realize their potential in all areas of human endeavor.

Invitationalism is a theory of practice which maintains that every person and everything in and around schools and other organizations adds to, or subtracts from, the process of being a beneficial presence in the lives of human beings. Ideally, the factors of people, places, policies, programs and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world in which each individual is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

An ethical theory, it is centered on five propositions:

- people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;
- education should be a cooperative activity;
- process is as important as product;
- people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor;
- institutional effectiveness can best be realized by places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others personally and professionally.

We focused especially on these five propositions to guide our self-examina-

tion. *People* denoted students and faculty, including the methods used to judge and evaluate them. *Place* refers to the physical appearance of the place, in addition to the educational climate--the heart and soul of the institution. We looked at *Policies* for clues to their flexibility, timeliness, and relevance to the institution's goals. *Programs*, too, were examined to determine their meaningfulness to our population, how they taught rational processes, critical thinking, problem solving, or civic awareness.

Finally, the *process* of education at KSC was part of the focus, including the facilitation of collegiality, shared ownership and team work. *In Search of Excellence* points out a very plain thesis: building teamwork, creating a kind of consensus, looking at the capacity for change, increasing opportunities, taking advantage of what one has should all be considered when discussing institutional effectiveness.

We turned to strong outside voices compatible with the invitational philosophy for help in defining this new approach. Educational leaders were invited to our campus so that we could dialogue with them first-hand about the factors which had the potential to lead us into a new era. Ernest Boyer was enormously influential in this process, reminding us of the connections which exist throughout society. George Keller's contrast of the characteristics between effective education managers and traditional college administrators was an important element. Also, Art Levine and Bud Hodgkinson added their strong voices in discussions of the demographic factors affecting higher education. These voices were guiding forces during this period of evolution for the college.

### A Commitment to Shared Governance

We realized that a new perspective was needed to facilitate the tactics and strategies needed for institutional success. The invitational model emphasizes optimism, respect, trust, and intentionality and, thus, supplied the fresh perspective we sought. While the approach is quite successful for more prosperous times, it is even more critical when a college is faced with expanded service expectations and level or reduced resources.

In his book on academic strategy, Keller points out that, "Innovation does not require extra resources so much as it requires people to push innovation. Energetic professionals . . . are the primary ingredients of organizational vitality" (p. 64). United by the theme "Sharing the Vision, Shaping the Future," my administrative colleagues and I pursued a variety of strategies aimed at building teamwork and for ensuring a powerful sense of ownership of all college policies and programs at all levels of the administrative hierarchy.

A dynamic planning approach was instituted to emphasize "strategic thinking" at all levels of the organization. Institutional planning became a shared responsibility and college-wide expectation was guided by constant and continuous monitoring of institutional progress. Regular "team meetings" were held to monitor progress, maintain momentum, and promote change. Our goal was not just to "get the job done" but to "get the job done right by the right people." Our commitment to teamwork assumed that the college could become a model institution only to the extent that its component parts -- department, programs, personnel, etc. -- worked together to face current and future challenges. Throughout the process the tenets of the invitational model guided us to promote shared vision and common purpose, the essential elements of sound strategic planning.

Positive affirmation of our emphasis on building teamwork came in 1985 when Kennesaw State was named in a national study conducted by George Mason Univer-

sity as one of the nation's top twenty colleges "on the move." The results of this study, published in the book *Searching for Academic Excellence* by Gilley, Fulmer, and Reithlingshoefer, affirmed that "Teamwork. . . is a crucial aspect of life at [all twenty selected] institutions and represents a genuine divergence from standard functioning at the majority of higher education institutions. Putting together an effective top administrative team was one of the first priorities of these presidents when they assumed their current posts" ( p.12).

Specific strategies were identified as a result of these efforts. Four of them which were particularly effective are described in the following sections. These strategies adopted at Kennesaw State College are not held up as a model for adaptation to other institutional settings. Instead we offer the following responses to strategic initiatives as examples of KSC programs which brought success to our campus — and which continue to produce excellent results at the present.

### **Success Strategy #1: Intentionally Inviting Students**

#### ***KSC 101: The Freshman Experience***

Established as a result of the "View of the Future" study, the "Freshman Experience Seminar" was initiated — and thrives today in a greatly expanded form — to enhance our students' social and academic integration into the college while providing a forum within which they could be encouraged to become the architects of their own success. Ernest Boyer's highly informative study *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* concludes that a caring college will make the freshman year a top priority, ensuring that all campus personnel are sensitive to the special needs of incoming students ( pp. 43-57).

Based on John Gardner's University 101 class at the University of South Carolina, the KSC 101 freshman experience program introduces freshmen and transfer students to the college and its resources. It also provides students with opportunities to develop the personal competencies necessary for success in college and in life while establishing links between individual needs and the resources available within the college community. The course also encourages students to incorporate a personally inviting attitude through classroom experiences aimed at increasing their awareness of self and others. Most importantly, students are encouraged and "intentionally invited" to perceive themselves as able, valuable and responsible.

As important as it is for students, the freshman seminar may be even more important and inviting to the faculty who teach it, for it provides an unparalleled opportunity to develop high-quality mentoring relationships with students. Faculty members who participate in workshops preparing them to teach this course become more aware of the need to send positive invitations to their students. They are also encouraged to reflect on the personal meaning and caring nature of teaching. Gordon Klopff and Joan Harrison assert that faculty members who care enough to invest in their students are like midwives who help students find a new identity (1982, p. 6). This course makes the faculty much more sensitive to the difficult transition faced by first-year students as they try to prove themselves to be capable college students. Every two years John Gardner meets with any new faculty to discuss techniques for a successful freshman seminar. Over the years more than 200 faculty have been trained to teach KSC 101.

KSC 101 is perhaps the hallmark program that marks Kennesaw State as an "invitational" college. Systematic evaluations of this program reveal that it has had

a direct positive effect on retention. Not only does the program benefit our “developmental” students, but our research clearly indicates that it also greatly enhances the success potential of our better prepared students.

A crucial theme of the course is that, as students grow in self-confidence as a result of expanding their self-knowledge, they are better prepared to meet the new challenges that lie ahead. This course emphasizes that self-knowledge is inextricably bound to being personally and professionally inviting with self, just as forming positive relationships with others is inextricably linked to actions that are personally and professionally inviting.

As an outgrowth of the overwhelmingly positive response to this freshman experience program, the college now offers a similar “senior seminar” course designed to bridge the gap between a student’s senior year and his or her professional career. The class is organized around the same model of invitationism as the freshman course. Through a series of readings, lectures, and exercises, the seminar focuses on the four principal components of the invitation model: being personally inviting with self, being personally inviting with others, being professionally inviting with self, and being professionally inviting with others. The central theme of the class is “we make our lives by understanding them, and we enjoy success by balancing the different relationships and responsibilities that make up our lives.”

## **Success Strategy #2: Intentionally Inviting Faculty, Staff and Students as Leaders**

Initial efforts to create a model of invitationism on campus also led to the establishment of programs to support the campus community.

One of these programs was the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) which serves as Kennesaw State’s most important agency of faculty development and renewal. CETL provides professional growth opportunities through seminars, workshops, newsletters, faculty grants, and summer research stipends. These programs encourage faculty to be professionally inviting to themselves by giving them access to innovative approaches for expanding their repertoire of teaching strategies, especially those that affirm the increasing diversity of our student body. CETL’s quarterly publication, *Reaching through Teaching* features articles by KSC faculty members on innovative approaches to enhancing the classroom experience. It has received numerous awards from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). The CETL Office recently expanded its services to include other institutions in the University System of Georgia. It initiated a state-wide teaching conference which brought leading state educators together in workshop sessions which centered on discussions about improving teaching methods. The conference was well received and a second event is already planned for next year.

CETL also administers a highly successful Leadership Kennesaw State College (LKSC) program. This initiative encourages faculty and administrators to assume leadership roles throughout the campus and throughout the local community. The objective of this innovative program is to invite and nurture faculty leadership development following the model that chambers of commerce use to promote community leadership. This program is designed especially for a select group of involved, dynamic, and promising faculty members and department heads who have expressed a desire to prepare themselves to become involved in the future leadership of higher education. A year-long commitment is required of participants who attend

monthly focus sessions emphasizing team building, interpersonal relationships, commitment to community, and a host of other invitational frames of reference--beginning and ending with a two-day retreat. The twenty leadership class participants also plan small group projects to benefit the campus. Group projects have included a conference on infusing multiculturalism into the classroom, national discipline-specific conferences, and preparing video tapes of our master teachers to establish a permanent resource for the college. The president and academic vice president are frequent members of the group, establishing a dialogue between faculty and the administration in a low structure, low stress setting.

Similar leadership programs are also conducted for students and staff. Both Student Leadership Kennesaw State and Staff Leadership Kennesaw State have been highly effective initiatives. All three of these innovative leadership programs have received national recognition and have been studied as models for similar programs at other institutions. Certainly part of their success can be attributed to the fact that they are based on the four principles of the invitational model: optimism, respect, trust, and intentionality.

### Success Strategy #3: Intentionally Inviting Diversity

A common denominator connecting all of these special programs is a growing need to honor the great diversity of the college's population. Diversity has become a focal point not just at Kennesaw State but across the nation. In fact, of the many societal changes affecting higher education, none is more prominent than the extraordinary diversity found at our colleges and universities. Not only are our campuses hosts to traditional students who enter college at eighteen and graduate four years later, but recent studies show that almost 50 percent of the nation's college students are twenty-four years of age or older. Indeed, the very culture of higher education is changing. The changes which were occurring some decade ago have come together to create a new reality. William Tierney notes in *Building Communities of Difference: Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century* that "If our communities of higher education have been built on homogeneity, then in the future they shall be built on 'difference.'"

Non-traditional students, along with minorities and international students, are the new majority, contributing great diversity to our student body. It is crucial that these students feel that their differences are respected on campus and that they can expect behavior on campus that conveys a message of optimism, trust, and respect. Roosevelt Thomas has written that change must occur not just on the limbs of the organizational tree. He cautions that the very roots of the organization must be altered for these pervasive changes to be accommodated and acculturated into organizations. It was this pervasive change which we sought at Kennesaw State.

Part of Kennesaw State's campus-wide commitment to honor diversity is a strong push to enhance minority participation in all aspects of college life. As an outgrowth of the philosophy that access and excellence are not polar opposites, several programs have been designed to invite the success of a diverse student body. The goal is the formation of a support network which connects all students to caring faculty, administrators, and peers.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Kennesaw State employed only six black faculty members, less than 5 percent of the total teaching faculty. Turn-over was high and morale was low. It is no wonder that only two percent of the student body in the fall of 1982 were black. As a public institution committed to

diversity, it was essential that the college give a high priority to the recruitment and retention of black faculty, staff, and students.

Today, 28 of the 314 full-time teaching faculty are black, giving Kennesaw State one of the highest percentages of black faculty among similar senior colleges in the University System of Georgia. Black faculty have been successfully recruited and retained in all of the college's schools and in most instructional departments. In addition, the number of black students enrolled tripled from 1982 to 1989. Over the last five years, minority student enrollment for all major ethnic groups has grown faster than majority student enrollment.

While striving to send intentional invitations throughout our campus, we have moved over the years from a celebration of Black History Week to a celebration of Black History Month, and we are working toward an ultimate goal of establishing a year-long, curriculum-wide focus that ensures a greater understanding of all aspects of this country's cultural diversity.

Programs supporting international students are also being established and strengthened. The Office of International Programs provides leadership and coordination in this arena, but support is received from every level of the campus community. The goal of infusing multicultural influences into the curriculum at every point has been identified and workshops and seminars have been held to explore ways to achieve this goal. Additionally, KSC has a decade-long relationship with Nanjing Normal University of Jiangsu Province, China which has resulted in many international visitors to campus. The college's international affairs major was recently established and draws upon disciplines across campus such as political science, history, economics, foreign language, anthropology and geography. Appropriately, these efforts are creating new connections among diverse campus populations.

#### **Success Strategy #4: Inviting the Community**

Along with our efforts to establish an administrative team committed to the invitational model, we are strong proponents of the national movement to transform institutions of higher education into "interactive" universities and colleges. Alan Ostar, former President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, offers the following definition of an interactive institution:

"[An institution] whose basic developmental strategy is to form an active and reciprocal partnership with the leadership (business, civic, and political) of its community or region, a partnership focused on the common goal of shaping a community that is strong and equitable, both economically and socially" (cited in Gilley, 1990, pp. 9-10).

In recognition of the community's needs and with an eye toward achieving a transformation to an "interactive" regional college, the college has added graduate programs in business administration, education, public administration, and accounting, as well as the Master of Business Administration for Experienced Professionals.

Additionally, campus initiatives have been organized to enable the college to better serve the community. The A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service links faculty expertise with community needs by holding public forums and seminars for public officials, local citizens, faculty, and students. The college has also won national awards for its Small Business Development Center, which provides specialized programs and training to family businesses. The Econometrics Institute also joins the college to the community by researching economic issues which affect our

region. In addition, although all colleges and universities strive to refine existing programs and to develop new ones, we endeavor to invite and carefully consider input from the community before initiating new courses of study or community services.

Kennesaw State's commitment to interact with all sectors of the community, thereby creating a powerful group of "stakeholders" who share the college's mission of excellence, includes a willingness to listen to and learn from local business, political, and community leaders. Now more than ever, colleges and universities need the support of the private sector. Not only does the private sector supply much needed financial support, but it can also contribute ideas, advice, and direction.

John Clendenin, Chairman and CEO of BellSouth Corporation, speaks often about the need for establishing connections between institutes of higher education and the business and political community. He maintains that if the strengths and talents of the leaders from the education community, the political community, and the business community are combined to create "a formidable braid of three threads" they will form a unit "much stronger than any single strand could ever be." He concludes that these three strands are essential for "reweaving this country's unraveling educational tapestry."

Kennesaw State has forged strong ties with the business community. Prominent business leaders lecture on campus as part of the Tetley Distinguished Leader Lecture Series, a monthly series funded by a corporate supporter. This program brings national and regional business executives to campus, permitting students to come face to face with the corporate leaders who are making business news. Ties with the community are also growing through the Family Business Center, the umbrella organization which resulted following a generous community contribution establishing the Chair of Private Enterprise. Now in its third year of supporting and celebrating the efforts of family-owned businesses, the Center has received accolades nationally for its innovative programming. Additionally, the Center receives more than 500 nominations for its annual Georgia Family Business of the Year awards which are presented to three exemplary family-owned companies. Programming in this area promises to grow due to recently realized community support permitting the establishment of the Chair for Entrepreneurial Management.

The college has formed a unique consortium uniting our region's public colleges, technical institutes and school systems. The mission of the six-member Cobb Education Consortium is to foster an exemplary "education culture" in which the community highly values education and appreciates the role of education in bolstering economic development and improving the quality of life not only in the community but in the entire region. Designed to interrelate the flow of students from kindergarten to graduate school, the group's primary goals are to make every person in the county literate; to prevent dropping out; to create an atmosphere of lifelong learning; and, to provide adequate resources for educational opportunities. Recently, the Consortium established a leadership program where consortium members come together to consider issues which will impact the county in the future.

## Conclusion

The invitational model at our college has provided a framework for spanning the gulfs that often separate college administrators, faculty, staff, and student from one another and the college from the community. Our efforts have changed not just the limbs of the organizational tree, but the roots, thereby allowing new growth

which will sustain the current members of the institution and enrich our collective future.

In one of my favorite poems, Philip Larkin concludes with the following stanza:

Reaching for the world, as our lives do,  
As all lives do, reaching that we may give  
The best of what we are and hold as true:  
Always it is by bridges that we live.

We at Kennesaw State strive to be the kind of master bridge builder that Larkin so eloquently describes. It is true that "It is by bridges that we live." And it is by invitations that we educate and serve.

### ***Suggested Reading***

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Thomas, R. Roosevelt, Jr. *Beyond Race and Gender*. New York, NY: AMACOM, 1991.

Tierney, William G. *Building Communities of Difference: Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1993.



# Metropolitan Universities: Who Are We?

Metropolitan universities are defined by the following characteristics:

**We are located in or near the urban center of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least 250,000.**

**We are universities, public and private, whose mission includes teaching, research, and professional service. We offer both graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and two or more professional fields. The latter programs are strongly practice-oriented and make extensive use of clinical sites in the metropolitan area.**

**The majority of our students comes from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socio-economic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.**

**We are oriented toward and identify with our regions, proudly and by deliberate design. Our programs respond to regional needs while striving for national excellence.**

**We are strongly interactive. We are dedicated to serve as intellectual and creative resources to our metropolitan regions in order to contribute to their economic development, social health, and cultural vitality, through education, research, and professional outreach. We are committed to collaborate and cooperate with the many communities and clienteles in our metropolitan regions and to help bridge the socio-economic, cultural, and political barriers among them.**

**We are shaping and adapting our own structures, policies, and practices to enhance our effectiveness as key institutions in the lives of our metropolitan regions and their citizens.**