

**Universities as Sites of Democracy  
And Civic Responsibility**

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**Introduction:** The University of Kentucky, the brainchild of John Bowman, was opened in 1865 as an Agricultural and Mechanical College. In 1916 the college was renamed the University of Kentucky (UK).

UK is located in the city of Lexington, in the central region of the state of Kentucky. Lexington has a population of 240,000. With a student population of 32,000, UK has eleven colleges, five professional schools, the Graduate School and Lexington Community College. There are 88 bachelor's level courses, 93 master's level areas, and more than 60 doctoral, specialist and professional degree programs. Specifically, there are programs in Agriculture, Allied Health Professions, Architecture, Arts and Sciences, Business and Economics, Communications and Information Studies, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Human Environmental Sciences and Social Work. Other professional programs include Dentistry, Law, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy.

UK is one of the 59 public universities in the country and the only one in Kentucky to be designated a Research University of first class repute by the Carnegie Foundation. Presently, UK boasts 40 nationally-ranked programs including clinical laboratory sciences, pharmacy, public policy, business administration, physical therapy, and economics.

UK, as a pioneer in cyber-classrooms and electronic frontiers, is representative of a computer-savvy place. Its Center for Networking Excellence is about offering leading-edge technology and high-speed computing access capable of handling 49 billion calculations per second. The UK campus's latest ResNet system provides state-of-the-art, absolutely rapid Internet access to students in residence halls and apartments.

UK is one of 29 co-partners in the Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University, a Web-based program to facilitate access to UK courses anytime, anywhere. This has elevated UK to be one of the country's top 100 universities for innovations in technology.

UK has a diverse campus community with more than 1600 students from 115 foreign countries, more than 1000 African-American students, and students from all 50 states of the nation, and from every Kentucky county. The total student body numbers 32,000, comprising 26,000 undergraduates and 6,000 graduate students.

UK's location at the heart of the city of Lexington augurs well for a great variety of job opportunities, entertainment, dining, recreation and cultural events. Lexington's business community is a priceless asset for part-time employment, cooperative education and internship programs.

The mission statement says:

**The University of Kentucky is a comprehensive, public, land grant university dedicated to preparing students for an increasingly diverse and technological world, improving the lives of people in the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world through teaching, research, and service.**

This statement sets the tone for this paper in the light of the university representing a site of democracy and civic responsibility.

Recently, UK has adopted the slogan "America's next great university." It's traditional motto is "United we stand – Divided we fall." According to The Students Handbook on Rights and Responsibilities, UK as an "equal opportunity university," is governed by principles collectively created by students, faculty and staff as ideals to strive for to reach a democratic campus environment. The principles, as stated in the handbook, are neither intended for enforcement per se, nor are they exclusionary of any race, ethnic background, religion or culture. They include:

- lifelong learning,
- academic excellence and personal responsibility
- self-empowerment
- freedom of thought and speech
- mutual respect and collective responsibility
- cultural diversity and human dignity

- teamwork and shared decision-making
- physical accessibility and personal safety
- environmental stewardship.

UK makes a meaningful effort with accessibility to the community and intentionally supports the policy objectives of the local government. The university does not regularly schedule hearings that are open to the public in order to solicit input and feedback on matters of university governance. Nonetheless, members of the local community are sometimes guest speakers in classes and sometimes supervisors for field experiences, thus offering a unique opportunity for real world wisdom. The College of Architecture currently has a classroom / showroom downtown, and the UK Art-Museum will soon move downtown to the old courthouse.

UK is governed by a board of trustees, made up of 13 appointive members, 3 alumni members, 2 members of faculty, a “staff” member and a student member - the President of the University’s Student Government Association (SGA).

Student Self-Governance: UK Student Government Association (SGA):

The Student Government is made up of the President and Vice President, with 35 Senators. The Committees are: Academic Rights, Community Services, Diversity Concerns, Disabled Students, Environmental Concerns, Government Concerns, Health Safety & Wellness, Public Relations, Recreation Facility and Tutoring.

The SGA operates an annual budget for students’ services. Less than 2% of students’ total university fees are held accountable for such services. As part of such services, students elect 42 students across campus to speak for and on their behalf to the faculty, staff, administration, Board of Trustees and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Besides, each year, the SGA strives to provide worthwhile programs to every student at fiscally responsible rates. UK students also benefit from free tutor services or are tutors themselves. Through the SGA machinery, students are entitled to book appointment with

lawyers for free advice, ranging from landlord contracts to criminal charges through to anything worth the sort. SGA provides safe escort services to students at night.

Under the auspices of the SGA, a Student Organizations Center (SOC) is involved in political, social, honorary, academic or specialty group programs. SOC is responsible for the provision of resource materials for meetings, fundraising, volunteer projects, and for exploring the array of co-curricular opportunities available on campus. The SOC also organizes leadership-training workshops. The themes for such workshops include: membership recruitment, team development, goal setting, program planning, and management. The democratic nature of SOC is evident in its efforts at providing opportunity to network with student leaders, faculty and staff of the campus community. This networking is an all year round activity.

Subsidiary students governments are described in terms of “organizations.” These are outgrowths of students’ interests serving the needs of a variety of students. Many of such organizations provide avenues for programs that supplement the classroom teaching-learning experience. Extending into areas of service for the community, all such organizations offer learning and leadership training for students, following The Code of Student Conduct, which prohibits student organizations from discriminating against any person due to race, color, or religious affirmation or belief.

There are over 300 legally registered organizations on campus. These include:

- Government organizations,
- Political organizations,
- Social sororities and fraternities,
- Honors and leadership organizations,
- Recognition societies,
- Departmental organizations and
- Professional fraternities.

There are also special interest groups such as:

- The Black Student Union,
- Cosmopolitan Club, and
- A wide variety of religious, athletic, community service, media, and military groups.

In all, UK has 22 and 17 national fraternities and sororities.

The student leader of SGA at the time of this survey is an African-American. This is a demonstration of a huge success for democracy. It gives credence to describing students, and students' campus life as public spirited, appropriately ambitious and absolutely inclusionary, without fear or favor.

UK has the Division of Student Affairs sponsoring a myriad of leadership programs to augment students' academic experiences. The Emerging Leader Institute is one particularly strong program that provides first year and sophomore students with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and increase their understanding of the principles of leadership.

#### Student Participation in Academic Affairs, Courses and Programs:

UK has an academic advising component which is responsible for assisting students in taking and developing meaningful educational plans compatible with their interest, potential, career and life goals. Academic advisors confer with students about course schedule and educational experience. Students themselves are responsible for their academic program and for making expected progress. As students go through the university's program their needs may change, and UK academic advisors provide assistance to students to meet these changing needs. Faculty advisors are the gateway to understanding the nature of the academic program and how it can address students' interests and goals. Professional advisors provide the most current information on university requirements, academic policies, procedures, and datelines. They mastermind the provision of guidance for the exploring students. Faculty usually serve as advisers to upper-class students in their majors.

By definition, “student participation in the creation and evaluation of courses and programs” is carried out by UK support offices such as: the Central Advising Services and Transfer Center, Counseling and Testing, University Career Services, and Minority Learning Services. Course evaluations are required by the University to ensure compliance to rules and regulations in the spirit of functional democracy.

UK has an Academic Ombud, who has the obligation of helping students resolve academic issues including but not limited to: unfair teaching and grading practices, violation of students’ academic rights, cheating and plagiarism.

The faculty of each college within the university and the faculty of the Graduate School have a form of Student Advisory Council (SAC) representing students’ opinion on academic matters pertinent to the particular college or school. The form of each Council as well as the areas of responsibility, are determined by the college or school. Students are however responsible for the selection of Council members by democratic process. Meanwhile, the faculty of each college or school determines whether a student member of its Student Advisory Council is entitled to vote with its faculty council or equivalent body on academic affairs.

#### Participation of Faculty in University Governance:

As mentioned earlier, UK is governed by a Board of Trustees and appointed members. The President of the University is the chief executive, assisted by an 11 member staff. The designated President’s staff includes vice-presidents for areas such as Fiscal Affairs, Public Relations, Management & Budget, Research and Graduate studies, Information systems, Athletic direction and a University’s general counsel.

Participation of faculty in university governance is a function of describing UK in terms of three campuses:

The Lexington campus is administered by a Chancellor / President. This position receives assistance from an Academic Services Vice Chancellor, and vice chancellors for administration, minority affairs, research and graduate studies, and students' affairs. Other administrators are: admissions director, registrar, dean of students, students' center director, residence life director, counseling and testing center director, the university career center director and a director of students' financial aid.

The Medical Center is manned by the Chancellor and Vice Chancellors for health systems & planning, research and graduate studies, budget and administrative services, information technology, academic and student affairs, clinical services, a special assistant to the Chancellor for Medical Center relations and a health service director.

In all, UK has twenty deans for academic areas of the following: Agriculture, Allied Health, Architecture, Arts & Sciences, Business & Economics, Communications & Information Studies, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, The Graduate School, Human Environmental Sciences, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Social work, Dean of Students, Undergraduate Studies and University Extension.

With this array of academic areas and related administrative concerns, UK is expected to be open and transparent in its decision-making. In this survey however, not one respondent agreed that during the past few years the university has become more open in its decision-making. This may change with a new president beginning his term July 1, 2001. There have been outside and inside suggestions that the combination of vice presidents and chancellors is unwieldy and top-heavy. As for participation of faculty in governance, two of their members are elected Trustees by their peers for purposes of membership to the UK council. Meanwhile, a Faculty Senate and Council are governing bodies for course changes and academic rules. Anyhow, in this survey 83.3% of faculty noted that rules are clearly followed for appointment to faculty and administrative positions.

The Lexington Community College has a President working with deans, chairs, directors and coordinators for areas such as: student affairs, multicultural affairs, center for community partnerships, humanities & business technology. Others are: social sciences & graphic technology, student employment services, financial aid, academic affairs, information services, behavioral sciences & information systems technology. The rest include: coordinators for physical sciences & engineering technology, learning resource center, admissions, business affairs, institutional effectiveness and planning, biological sciences & nursing, natural sciences & health technology, student support center, public relations / marketing, and a registrar.

Informing Students of UK about their Rights and Responsibilities:

In addition to courses in the university that promote an understanding of civic duty and responsibility, UK has an absolutely explicit publication on “Student Rights and Responsibilities.” This students’ handbook contains sections such as on rights and responsibilities governing non-academic relationships, rules of the university senate governing academic relationships, regulations governing manner of meetings, demonstrations and other forms of assemblies. This is made available to students upon request free of charge. This is a clear manifestation of UK’s commitment to democratic principles.

UK consciously encourages students to demonstrate their rights both as members of the student body and as citizens of the nation and the world. For example, the Academic Ombud Services on campus assists in resolving academic disputes between students and faculty or administration. As citizens of the nation, UK students and faculty vote. During the 1996 election, both Vice President Gore and President Clinton spoke on campus. With regards to the world, the Office of International Affairs (OIA) provides leadership, coordination, and service to the university and the community in areas such as: service to international students, study abroad program / services, international research contracts and grants to offer overseas experiences to faculty and staff and to attract international students to UK, and the internationalization of the curriculum / campus / community.

The International Student and Scholar Service (ISSS) is another primary resource for international students at UK. ISSS arranges the meeting of arriving international students at the airport, facilitates students' housing needs, organizes full time orientation program, provides advice on immigration, offers English classes for free, maintains and operate an emergency loan fund and limited scholarship aid. The ISSS also advises students on non-academic matters such as sponsoring international students' organizations, cross-cultural activities for international students and Americans in the form of a Cosmopolitan Club and the International Hospitality Program.

UK's study abroad services provides information, counseling and services for students interested in working, traveling, or studying abroad.

Interestingly, equal numbers of respondents indicated "yes" and "no" as regards being aware of projects involving UK and the wider community, as described above. It is difficult to tell whether this is due to lack of information or students' own lack of interest. Nonetheless, it is easy to tell the democratic nature of these programs by the very display of numerous posters at vantage points all across campus advertising these programs / activities by OIA and ISSS for example.

UK just celebrated 50 years of African-Americans, but they have fought for their right to be included. Even now, people remember an earlier famous basketball coach who would not recruit black players and the University continues to have a poor reputation within many black communities. Neither undergraduate enrollment nor graduation rates have met objectives. However, the University is committed to opportunities for participation and tolerance. The present and highly respected basketball coach is an African-American.

Currently, there is a Vice-Chancellor for Minority Affairs. The services and programs of the Office of Minority Affairs (OMA) tend to emphasize support for African-American students, faculty and staff, other students of minority cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the overall advancement of an inclusive learning environment for faculty, staff and students. Events supporting an inclusive learning community are frequently organized

and advertised. For example, discussions are being held in spring 2001 on diversity and minority issues.

At UK, the Director of African-American Student Recruitment maintains contact with schools, community organizations and churches to identify potential students for the University. In addition there is a Director of Minority Student Fiscal Affairs serving as informant to students on financial aid availability to cater for their university education.

Other minority participation services at UK include: short-term motivational counseling, orientation, non-academic advising, problem-solving assistance with employment, adjustment to university life, development of cooperative programs – concerning educational, social, or cultural relevance to African-American students and / or students of other minority groups. Organizational and administrative assistance is equally provided to students' organizations for planning projects and programs. One excellent example is the Martin Luther King Jr. Cultural Center. Even though the center functions to contribute to the quality of life for African-American students, it serves the interest of the entire UK environment and the broader community. This function is carried out by way of promoting understanding of and appreciation for other cultures and their heritage. A number of educational and social activities are organized and implemented throughout the year. They include: lectures, workshops, seminars, art exhibitions, theater, music and dance. The center also takes delivery of, supervises, maintains and takes custody of a collection of books, periodicals, multimedia kits, records, audio and videotapes – all of which address the diverse aspects of African-American culture. Meanwhile the center provides a relaxed and of course a stimulating atmosphere geared towards encouraging the retention of African-American students and making UK a comfortable and inviting entity. An African-American Studies academic program was initiated in 1992 and offers a minor.

Institutional transparency and governance:

UK's governing machinery, policies, announcements, and the like are made public by way of television broadcasts, FM transmission stations on campus, newsletters, memos, newspapers, written notices, bill-boards, web-sites, email to faculty and staff, and others.

UK has numerous facilities for hosting faculty, board, staff or student meetings in accordance with rules and regulations. News or media coverage of such meetings is governed by the rule of law – thus events such as sports, projects, and personalities are featured with due caution for libel. This is because UK recognizes and confirms the right of all members of the university community to free expression, assembly, and advocacy. In this survey respondents were of the opinion that the means of communicating different views on campus are adequate. Both students and faculty were, for example, vigorously involved in the quest for a new President for UK through various means of communication including the campus students' newspaper.

**Teaching, Research and Service to the community at UK:**

UK's teaching mission is exemplified in undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, professional, and lifelong education informed by scholarship and research, and guided by a spirit of integrity and mutual respect. Its research activities are tailored in the direction of promoting human and economic development through the expansion of knowledge and also its application in the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, business, and the professions. In reaching out to the community, UK collaborates with educational, professional, business, healthcare, and agricultural partners at home and abroad, in sharing, disseminating, and application of knowledge.

On teaching for democracy, respondents in the survey pointed out that the Institution's curriculum fosters social and political knowledge students will need to assume the duties of citizenship upon graduation. However, some respondents noted that the university does not provide forums to express unpopular viewpoints. This is not surprising in the event of some students' arrest and detention after demonstrating about the global

sweatshop issue in April 2000. In any case, the university's efforts and programs specifically geared toward issues of civic responsibility or citizenship were fairly ranked by respondents. Specific subject areas and / or courses listed by respondents include: Service learning opportunities in coursework in a number of colleges, political science, sociology, social studies education, Education in American culture, Politics of higher education, and Philosophy.

Similarly, the programs or departments in the university where one would most likely find courses that explicitly address issues of democracy include: Political Science, Sociology, Arts, College of Education, Social Work, History, Social Science Courses, Department of Philosophy, Social Studies Education, African-American Studies, Women's Studies, and Educational Policy & Evaluation.

#### **Discussion on Student and Faculty Reactions:**

The survey revealed that UK intentionally supports the policy objectives of the Institution and the wider community or local government. This is carried out through conscious efforts to encourage students to get involved in politics and policy. Students were of the opinion that voting in elections, both in the university and in the county in which the university is located, plus voting in a nation-wide election, are good examples of student civic mindedness.

To some extent students at UK are allowed to give input into the configuration of their education programs. They have adequate information about choosing or changing their course of study. Some members of the faculty are vigorously concerned about encouraging students to consider options to study at other campuses or in another country as part of their program of study and enrichment.

With a majority of students responding in the negative, it seemed that students do not have sufficient knowledge of political organizations on campus, but 50% however were aware that UK has programs whose espoused purpose is the study or promotion of democracy.

UK is appropriately very sensitive to the presence of foreign students or students from other countries on campus. This is adequately catered for by both the University's and students' administrations. The university in particular provides special services for student minorities or different racial or ethnic groups or from other countries. The student minorities (or different racial / ethnic groups or students from other countries) in turn develop their own ways of participating in university life somewhat independent from established venues. Hence, respondents indicate that the university does an adequate job of providing services and information to students from other countries that allows their full participation in University life. Indeed, most students are aware of what offices and personnel are responsible for student life.

By and large students have an important stake in judicial and disciplinary units of the university that addresses students behavior and academic integrity. There are of course, programs at the university that include opportunities for students to work, conduct research or interact with local community political, civic, or religious organizations as part of their learning experiences. The overriding opinion in this direction suggested that there are sufficient opportunities to attend events (lectures, symposia, workshops, or performances) at the university that explore major issues of campus community, the local area, the nation and the world from socio-political and economic perspectives. In the school year 2000 – 2001, for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Maya Angelou were major speakers, with an overwhelming student, faculty and community attendance.

UK actively promotes students' involvement in the community through community-based projects, and encouragement to vote in local (UK, Community, and national) elections. According to student respondents in this survey, the university's ability to encourage public debates of major societal political issues, and the programs specifically geared toward issues of civic responsibility or citizenship, were judged as fair.

Meanwhile, the number of public events that promote the understanding of democratic processes and political participation are too few but seemed just about right for students

engrossed in academic work. Respondents expressed the feeling that students are less enthusiastic about voting in university, local and national elections.

As regards students' participation in community projects, respondents indicated other avenues than voting in elections. They noted that participation in community projects is sometimes by way of: student clubs and organizations, fraternities / sororities, personal membership in non-university organizations, political party affiliation, faculty research project, university-sponsored projects, and through faith-based organizations. Notwithstanding, respondents explained that, incorporating a community-based learning experiences with their studies is sometimes time-consuming, but personally rewarding, besides complementing other learning experiences at the university.

As far as the **faculty respondents** are concerned, the university has adequate Institutes, Centers or programs whose purpose is the study or promotion of democracy or democratic practices. A majority of faculty respondents have offered courses that promote engagement of civic responsibility, and can testify that there are multiple venues or channels for students to participate in university governance. The faculty is also aware that if a student finds himself / herself accused of violation of university rules concerning academic integrity there are institutional resources – individuals and / or departments available to assist the student understand their rights and access to procedural process.

On the part of University administration, UK has a record, despite imperfections, of regularly consulting with students in its decision-making processes. Even though students create and manage their own organizations apart from those sponsored by the University, the central administration of students expects the University to hold regularly scheduled meetings or hearings in order to solicit input or feed back on matters of university governance.

Concerning teaching, research, and community services, faculty makes it a point to invite community residents with expertise to lecture at the university. Students are equally encouraged to conduct research projects in connection with classroom assignments that

are field-based or draw upon the surrounding community or region for data. In a sense this is because, according to faculty respondents, one of the university's primary purpose is to be the support of local and national goals. Faculty are aware that students would get involved in the community if they received some tangible reward for doing so. Hence, course credits are awarded to students who engage in "Service Projects," as they are called at UK, to encourage participation and democratic citizenship. In this way university research projects have fostered university-community cooperation. The joint programs between the university and the community are therefore mostly course-related experiences (internship & training, for instance).

About students' political organizations, an overwhelming majority of faculty respondents indicated that students have their own socio-political organizations, in accordance with the statutes of the University. The existence of adequate university machinery allows faculty, staff, and students to raise questions on how the university is run with administration. Through its numerous media, the University provides sufficient information concerning the espoused goals of the education it provides. University publications constitute the highest source of information for students. In this vein, students are consulted on matters beyond issues limited to student life. For example, in spite of the university not encouraging students to take an active part in actual design of their courses of study, avenues are available for students to get enrolled in courses that fit their interest and employment goals.

According to faculty respondents, the community government, organizations, and groups welcome student voting in local elections. Hence, the university sponsors regularly scheduled publicly accessible events that address political issues from various perspectives.

No UK faculty indicated that student participation in university governance is very effective. In fact the majority of faculty respondents stated that participation in University governance is somewhat effective, with only about 17% stating that it is effective. Faculty further substantiated their position by indicating that students do not take full

advantage of the information available to understand their rights. Meanwhile, there are sufficient avenues for all students to participate in the life of the university or in student activities they wish to pursue. Thus, UK provides sufficient advance announcement and publication of events to allow students opportunities to attend. There are no groups of students on campus excluded from university life and governance. In this survey student respondents agreed that when necessary students can take advantage of information available to them in understanding their rights for participation. However, with almost equal proportions of respondents indicating “yes” and “no,” it is hard to tell whether there are opportunities for participation in different levels of decision making in the university. In resource allocation, responses show 50% agreeing in respect of allocation of financial and other institutional resources (space, supplies, etc.) around the university being carried out on a fair and equitable basis.

On the issue of students’ participation in community-based projects, faculty acknowledged that it always encourages civic-mindedness and sometimes promotes democratic attitudes. It also increases political participation in students and helps connect theory to practice. Finally, faculty confirm that, students’ participation in community projects are sometimes by way of course assignments, student clubs and organizations, faith-based organizations, personal membership in non-university organizations, political affiliation, faculty research projects, and university-sponsored projects. Thus the community-based teaching, research and services are mutually beneficial to students, faculty and the wider community. Hence, the accessibility of the university’s facilities is significant in promoting overall university-community partnership and democracy. With a newly appointed president, UK looks forward to a more open decision-making process, more shared governance, and more connections with the community.

**Respondents:**

Office of the Graduate School

Dean

Department Chair

Director

Coordinator

Faculty

Students' Government Outfit

University FM Station

University Publications

Doctoral Students

Graduate Students

Undergraduate Students

*Documents:*

Student Rights and Responsibilities (1999) University of Kentucky, Lexington.

University Bulletin (1999 –2000) University of Kentucky, Lexington.

University Website: [www.uky](http://www.uky)