



# Student Philanthropy & Strategic Planning at Kennesaw State University: An Applied Research Project



## ABSTRACT

Philanthropy plays a historical role in supporting higher education. Student philanthropy (defined as promoting a philanthropic culture among students by encouraging them to make donations rooted within their campus passions) is becoming a new approach to increasing a university's annual fund and unrestricted dollars. This applied research project resulted in the creation of a five-year strategic plan that will serve as a guide to developing annual student and eventually young alumni giving at Kennesaw State University. This project utilized research from a literature review, content analysis of strategic planning best practices, and phenomenological data rooted in the author's experience.

## Research & Methodology

### Research Question

What are the best practices in higher education student philanthropy programs?

### Methodology

The methodology consisted of qualitative and quantitative information such as a literature review, interviews of the Department of Annual Giving staff and KSU SPC board members, a 1st year evaluation using the John M. Bryson Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations Workbook, and reviewing documents (data review) all listed below.

In efforts to understand the potential fundraising through student philanthropy programs has to impact a higher education institution, a literature review was conducted using 16 credible sources such as: peer reviewed articles published by the International Journal of Educational Advancement, ASHE Higher Education Report, and information provided by the Council for Advancement for Support of Education (CASE).

## Literature Review

Reviewing literature from resources like the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, the researched focused on the importance of private donations to universities, purpose of student philanthropy programs, increasing student engagement, cultivating student donors, and the potential for using student giving as a predictor for young alumni giving patterns.

Over the past several decades state funding of higher education institutions has plummeted from 14.6 percent in 1990 to 9.4 percent in 2014 (Lincoln Project, 2015, p. 8). Universities are choosing to strengthen their giving programs rather than drastically increasing tuition cost for students. In response to the increasing operating cost and decreased funding, universities are creating student philanthropy programs to not only increase unrestricted funding, but also cultivate the next generation of young alumni donors. According to a December 2009 Academic Impressions survey reporting responses from nearly 200 development, student giving, and alumni relations professionals within public and private higher education institutions, nearly 43% of the new student philanthropy programs had been created within the last three years (Ezarik, 2010, p.1). Creating strong successful programs requires providing education to the board of directors, creating and abiding by the organizations governing documents, soliciting for student gifts through campus wide events, rewarding students for campus engagement, and continuous program evaluation.

## References

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Figure 1 – The KSU SPC attended C.A.S.E. A.S.A.P.



Figure 2 – Student participant on TAG Day

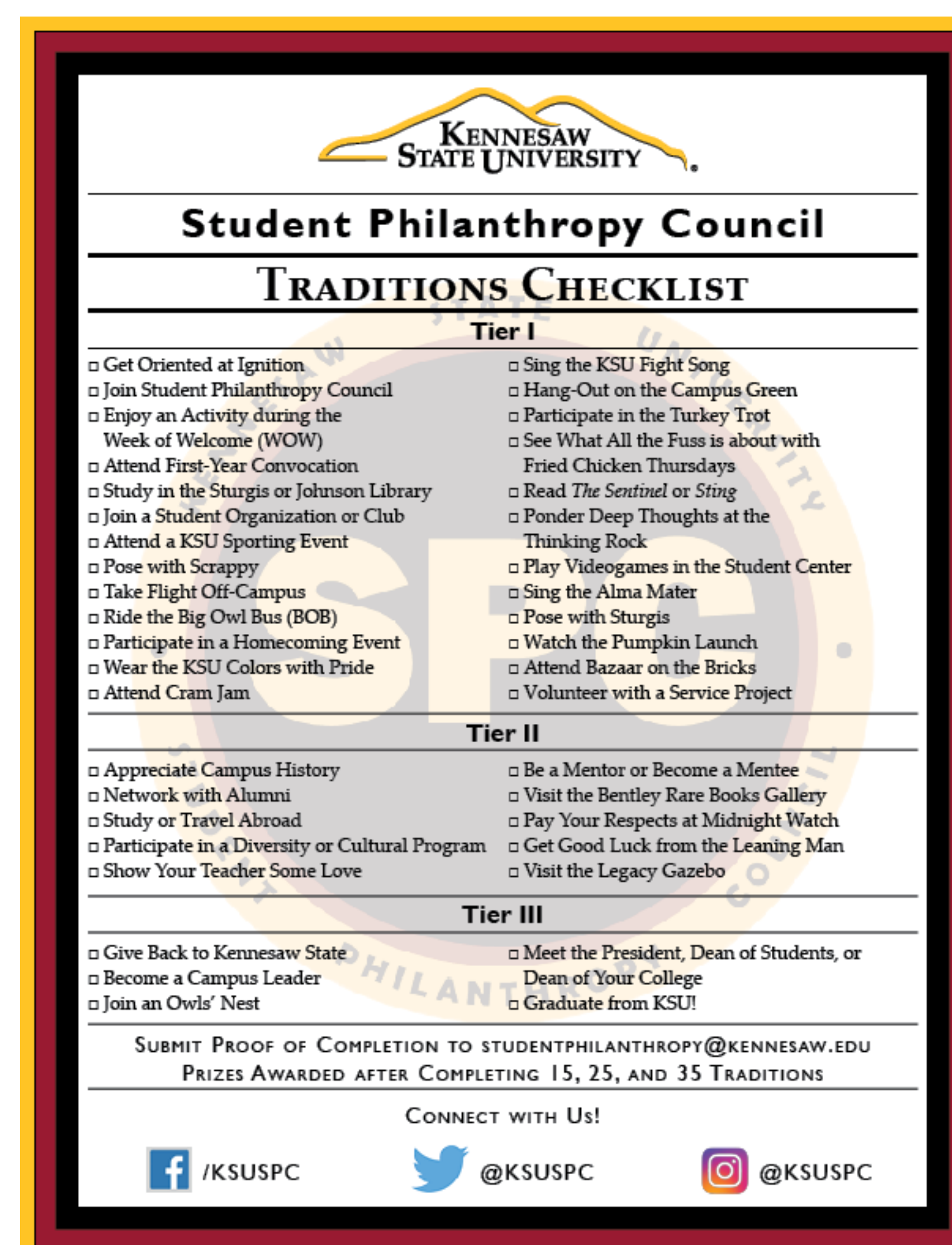


Figure 3 – Traditions Checklist

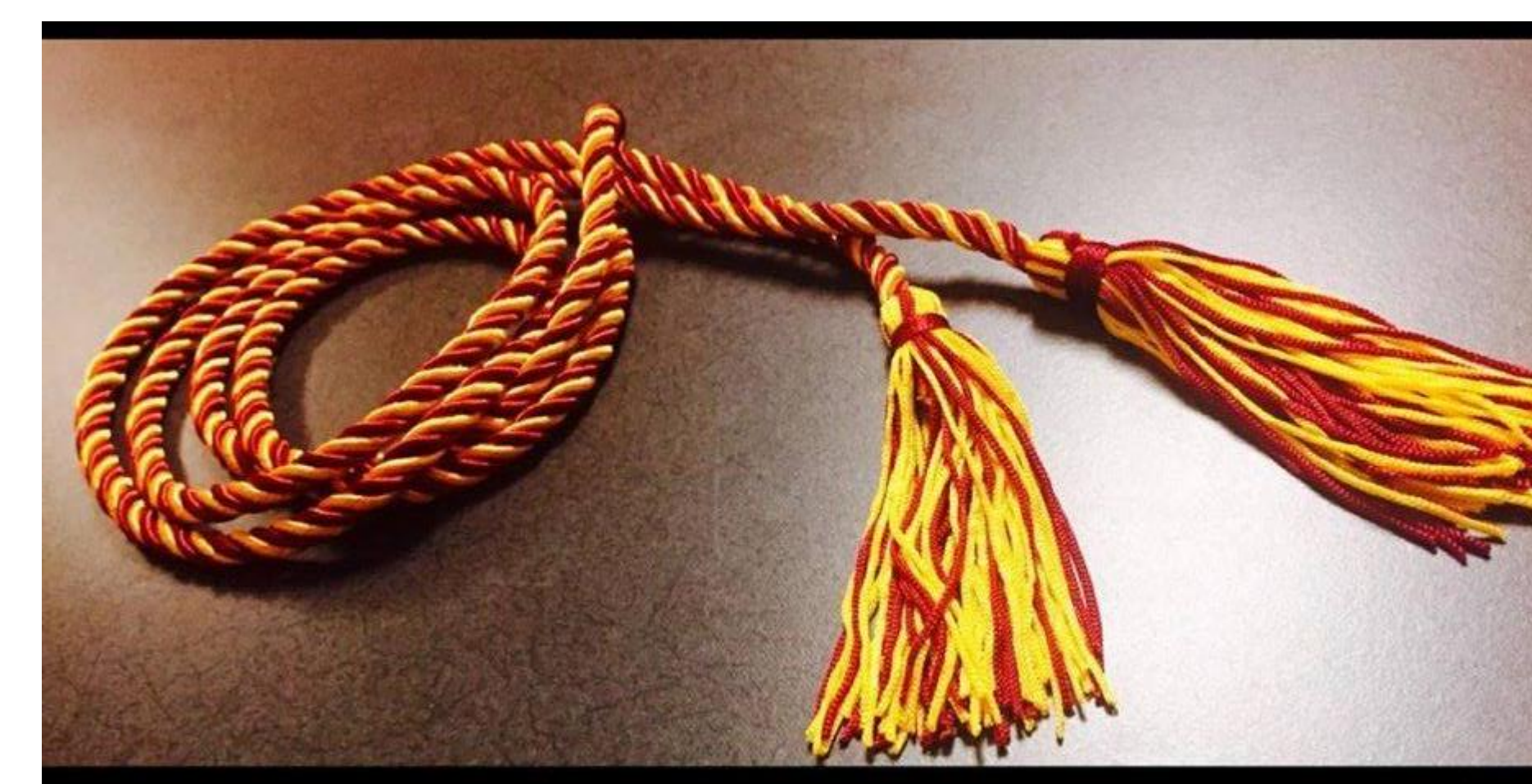


Figure 4 – Student Philanthropist Graduation Cord

## COMPETENCY APPLICATION

### NLA Competency Area 8 - Program Development

Program Development - equipped students with the fundamentals of program design, knowledge on successful implementation and evaluation, as well as appropriate methods to aiding populations effected by social injustices.

As the founding President of the Student Philanthropy Council (SPC), the student worked with the KSU Department of Annual Giving to create the organization's mission, governing documents like bylaws, and recruit for vacant board positions. Conducting research on the best practices of student philanthropy programs allowed the student to identify potential for growth within the organization.

### NLA Competency Area 5 - Governance, Leadership & Advocacy

Governance, Leadership & Advocacy – encouraged students to develop a deeper understanding of the permissible roles of advocacy, capacity of leadership within a board of directors, and the steps to overall efficient operation of nonprofits.

The student serves on the executive board of SPC and as founding member created the organizations bylaws, strategic plan, TAG Day event manual, and board manual. Working to create the strategic plan included completing a SWOT Analysis, board member, and organization evaluation. The student also implements Robert's Rule during voting procedure. Creating this strategic plan required the student to conduct a board analysis, organizational evaluation, and complete a SWOT Analysis giving the student a deeper understanding of the needs of the organization.

### NLA Competency Area 1 - Communication, Marketing & Public Relations

Communication, Marketing & Public Relations – informs students of the proper and most effective ways to engage nonprofit constituents.

The student researched the best practices within student philanthropy programs that allows for successful constituent engagement. Implementing the research learned through the reaching the goals outlined within the strategic plan, the KSU SPC will work towards increases philanthropic nature and student giving within the KSU student body.

## Implications

One of the best practices of student philanthropy programs is to expose the board members to continuous education about university development and organization governance. The Student Philanthropy Council (SPC) has the opportunity for continued education by being advised by Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Department of Annual Giving and through attending C.A.S.E. conferences. (Figure 1) The most successful student philanthropy programs host events like Thank A Giver Day or TAG Day to promote awareness on the importance of philanthropy to a university. While the SPC does host TAG Day annually, it was discovered that they current layout has the potential to be improved by making it more community themed. (Figure 2) Though research, it was discovered that the largest area that could use improvement is campus exposure. While the SPC does distribute brochures to students and staff, the organization needs to take the initiative to encourage campus engagement. As a solution to increasing the number of students who know about SPC and engage on campus, the Traditions Checklist was created. (Figure 3) Giving as a student is on the checklist, allowing them to become KSU Student Philanthropists. Student Philanthropist are rewarded with prizes for every 15, 25, and 35 traditions they complete, making them KSU Tradition Keepers. Student Philanthropist who give an average of 10 dollars each year they are enrolled also receive Student Philanthropist graduation cords. (Figure 4)

Using the knowledge gained through researching the best practices in student philanthropy, the student created a four year strategic plan for the Student Philanthropy Council (SPC) to focus on promoting students to complete their Traditions Checklist, strengthening the governing board, and becoming financial secure as an organization. Through conducting a SWOT Analysis the SPC identified the following weaknesses: having no foundation account, high board member turnover, not following the bylaws, low social media presence, and having no form of board orientation. With weaknesses identified, the SPC created these goals to addresses the aforementioned problems: (1) Create a partnership with the SGA to market the SPC Traditions Checklist. (2) Create a Traditions Initiative Committee. (3) Create a 'Tradition Tour' to allow students to become more engaged on campus and complete their checklists. (4) Open foundation account. (5) Establish a need based Student Philanthropy Scholarship at the amount of 1,000 dollars per year, per recipient. (6) Create a Board of Directors Manual (7) Create a Student Philanthropy Council Board Member Orientation.