

# KENTUCKY

## Alumni

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### Rising Stars

*Attracting UK's Brightest*

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# RISING STARS



By Christina Noll

## More top rated students are choosing the University of Kentucky as their place to shine

**T**he saying goes: if you want to succeed, surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.

When it comes to choosing an institution for their higher education, most top students care about only one thing: “How smart are the kids sitting next to me?” In other words, what’s the competition like?

The University of Kentucky has a proud tradition of top-notch programs and graduates who go on to unequalled success. We like to note our winning tradition in athletics. But more and more, that winning tradition includes our academic successes. One notable example is the high caliber of students UK is attracting each year.

Alumni are very proud of what’s happening at UK. So are faculty, staff and current students. People are excited about the academic tone that is set at the university. Top ranked students coming in means top ranked graduates going out into the workforce, and a higher value placed on a degree from the University of Kentucky, as well as even greater pride for our alumni. “We’ve worked very hard to align all our resources

and align our objectives to reach this goal of attracting the most academically talented students — and it’s happening, which is really exciting,” says Don Witt, vice provost for Enrollment Management.

The statistics speak for themselves. Last fall, UK boasted its most well-prepared class in its history. The average ACT score for the fall 2010 incoming freshman class was a 25.2 — well above the national average of 21 and the state average of 19.4. Also in 2010, 33 of Merit Scholars, 147 of high school valedictorians and 371 of Governor’s Scholars and Governor’s School for the Arts students enrolled at UK. Those averages speak well to the fact that more top students in state and out of state are choosing to enroll at UK.

And candidates for top scholarships are up as well. UK’s top scholarship, the Otis A. Singletary Scholarship, requires applicants to hold a minimum 31 ACT score and a 3.75 unweighted high school GPA. In 2010, the university set a record of just under 600 students eligible for the 25 available Singletary scholarships. As incredible and exciting

as that is, Witt says, “This year, we know we’re going to break that record.”

As a group, this year’s admitted students have higher scores than last years, and those were better than the year before, and so on. But of course, for many high school students, receiving an acceptance letter from UK is only one of many acceptance letters from which they have to choose.

So why are more highly-qualified students choosing UK?

The main reason: success breeds success. As more top students talk about attending UK, their friends are listening. Students of this caliber are watching statistics and weighing their options. If they see that UK is attracting top students, they are more likely to come to UK. It is more desirable to say, “I’m admitted to the University of Kentucky,” because it’s no longer an automatic thing. Students want to know when they choose UK, they are making a step up. Not everyone is accepted and when those that are get here, it is going to be challenging.

“Students want that. They want to be competitive when they graduate and they see

that at UK we have very successful alumni who graduate and go on to do really great things,” says Brian Troyer, associate director of Undergraduate Admission. “They understand, as my colleague, Stephen Barnett likes to say, ‘College isn’t the 13th grade’ — this is a whole other level.”

High-caliber students now look at UK as one of their choices, right along with the Ivy League and elite schools. “Times have changed — and the image of the university has changed,” says Witt. “That message is getting out there inside the state and beyond. That momentum just keeps building and building.”

### The laws of ‘blue’ attraction

Personalized information is the key to influencing the college decision, especially in out-of-state markets. Launched in 2007, the university’s “see blue.” marketing campaign has been instrumental in increasing awareness about UK in out-of-state markets. In addition, current students, along with alumni and staff, help attract the best and the brightest through letter writing campaigns, personal phone calls, Send Off Parties, Preview Nights and more. Record setting events, with strong turnouts, result in more applications to UK. And more applications mean a greater percentage of top ranked students chosen.

But making the critical college choice is about more than just a “good feeling.” Students are evaluating a return on their investment; they want to know if the cost and time will be worth it in the end.

The task for everyone in enrollment management is to make sure students and parents are aware of the incredible academic offerings at UK. Specifically, that includes the undergraduate research program. “The top high school students are coming here having already been exposed to research. When they learn from our recruiting efforts that we have an office dedicated to undergraduate research, they are excited,” says Diane Snow, director of the Office of Undergraduate Research at UK. “There’s a long list of people who have been successful in their careers because of their exposure to undergraduate research — in many cases, independent research — here at UK.”

There are so many opportunities at UK, with over 200 majors, and so many top ranked programs, prospective students

Undergraduate student applications			
Fall semester applicants	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Applied	11,120	12,195	13,537
Admitted	8,757	8,966	9,275
Enrolled	4,110	4,153	4,328
Percent of applicants who were admitted	78.8%	73.5%	68.5%
Percent of admitted applicants who enrolled	46.9%	36.3%	46.7%

can’t help but be drawn to the university. Lizzy Bauer, a biology and chemistry freshman and Singletary Scholar, agrees. “While researching schools, I noticed that UK offered a large variety of major/minor options,” she says. “In fact, UK was the only school that offered all three of my top major choices.”

Bauer, who plans to attend medical school after earning her undergraduate degrees, believes that UK is an academic institution on the rise, continually evolving through students and faculty who dedicate themselves to education and success. “I

have no doubt that after my education at UK is complete, I will have the knowledge and confidence to be successful in anything I choose to pursue,” says Bauer.

But even with extensive academic offerings, along with outstanding athletic traditions, some students still might not be convinced UK is the place for them, due to social or economic factors. Some prospective students view UK as a large place, one that can be intimidating. For this reason, Enrollment Management makes it a priority to put a personal face on what’s happening at the university. “We hear time and



Members of Enrollment Management gather at the Boone Center for an informal conversation with students. Left to right are, Lizzy Bauer (freshman, biology & chemistry, Singletary Scholar); Don Witt, vice provost for Enrollment Management; Dorneshia Thomas (sophomore, psychology), Bill Klingenberg (junior, social work, veteran); Stephen Barnett, associate director of Undergraduate Admission; Brian Troyer, associate director of Undergraduate Admission; and Candace Terry (senior, Russian studies, Veteran’s Resource Center work-study).

Photo: Shauna King

## Top ranked transfer students are also on the rise

Members of Transfer Recruitment are traveling throughout the state to make sure the best and the brightest transfer students know what UK has to offer. Transfer Recruitment puts a special focus on the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), to make sure students at those institutions are encouraged to transfer to UK. “As long as students are holding a certain GPA at KCTCS, they can transfer in to UK,” says Prim Wathen, associate director of Transfer Recruitment in the Office of Undergraduate Admission.

Senior Travis Leffew transferred to UK from KCTCS in Somerset after obtaining the Trustees Scholarship for Transfer Students. “Going to UK had always been a personal dream of mine,” he says. He credits Wathen, along with the Student Ambassador Program, as being major factors in his successful transfer.

“KCTCS and UK have an amazing system called Block Transfer where students can take certain classes that are completely transferable,” says Leffew. “Outside of an amazing recruiter and adequate future planning, transferring to UK was made easier by joining extracurricular programs, including Wildcat Marching Band and Men’s Choir, living on campus, and enrolling in UK 201, a class to help transfer students adjust to UK life.” Leffew says the personal touch and one-on-one attention transfer students receive from UK cannot be underrated.

“Our job is to make that a seamless process for the students,” says Wathen.

To make the transfer option even more desirable, an option exists to help ease the financial strain of paying for a degree at a top ranked university. BCTC Blue + is a transfer/dual enrollment program between Bluegrass Community Technical College and UK that includes advising, guaranteed admission, UK courses at BCTC tuition rates, and much more for students considering transferring to UK from that institution.

time again from prospective students when they’re visiting that once they get on campus they are blown away by how personal their experience is,” says Witt.

It all starts with the UK Visitor Center. Prospective students can attend an information session, followed by a student-guided campus tour. Individual itineraries can also be arranged. Christine Spiecher,

director of the UK Visitor Center, explains, “We’re a one-stop shop. Prospective students and their families can get all the information they need in just one visit to campus. With a few weeks advance notice, we can set up individualized appointments with any department on campus they’d like to talk with, for a truly personalized campus tour.”

Students agree — it’s all about the campus visit. “When I visited, I fell in love with the campus,” says Bauer. “Not only that, but the UK employees took the time to connect with me on a personal level and make me feel as though this was my home.”

Another area of concern for prospective students is the rising cost of a college education. “More and more students and their families are having conversations about the economy and how they’re going to pay for a college education. We are very empathetic with families and we’re open to having very candid conversations with students and parents about what the process of paying for college really looks like,” explains Troyer.

For this reason, many UK Preview Nights feature separate workshops called “Financing Your Future” where students can gain valuable information about academic scholarships, such as the President’s Scholarship Initiative, financial aid and account services in an informal setting. Advisors at UK walk students through the application process, all the way from getting admitted to how they’re going to pay their bills once they get to UK. “We’re very open and up front with families about the cost,” says Troyer. “And knowing that our tuition rates are relatively competitive, we find that it’s one of the reasons students are choosing UK.”

## Rolling out the Wildcat welcome mat

Application. Acceptance. Decision. These are major steps on the journey to higher education, but it doesn’t stop once the students get to UK. The Chellgren Center for Undergraduate Excellence has been identifying and supporting talented undergraduate students at UK since 2005. Its mission is to advance the university in three areas: student excellence, teaching excellence and program excellence.

“The highest level of academic attainment requires talent and the right experiences. The Chellgren Center strives to affect the latter,” says Philipp Kraemer, Chellgren Chair for Undergraduate Excellence. “We provide the kinds of guidance and opportunities that enable our most talented students to excel well beyond their stellar performance in the classroom. Equally important, we attempt to instill in these students the confidence, ambition and tools to realize extraordinary aspirations.”

## First time, first-year student profile

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Total	4,110	4,153	4,329
Female	2,099	2,118	2,219
African American	347	403	418
Out of State	999	897	1,012
International	32	44	47
Full Time	4,079	4,111	4,283
Governor’s Scholars and Governor’s School for the Arts	389	404	371
Merit Scholars	32	31	33
Valedictorians	133	141	147

In addition to academic support, UK is working hard to make sure students are getting a bang for their buck, so to speak. Technology, residence life, and opportunities that take students beyond the classroom are part of the reason UK is attracting the best and the brightest. “Student affairs and academic affairs go hand in hand,” explains Witt.

An example is residence life. The majority of incoming freshmen live in a residence hall — approximately 92 percent — and a good residential experience is a key to new and current student success. Incoming students are strongly encouraged to live on campus because they are more likely to become involved and build a connection with the university. “Students who live on campus make better grades and have higher retention rates and graduation rates than students who don’t,” says Robert Mock, vice president for Student Affairs. “That’s the key — living on campus and being engaged on campus.”

Enrollment Management and Student Affairs have worked together to form Living-Learning Communities throughout the residence halls. These communities allow students who share common majors, classes and other interests to live together in the same residential area. “We want students to feel good about whatever hall they’re in and these communities speak well to that,” says Witt. “We’re trying to move beyond the facility, and make it more about the experience students have here at UK and the benefits that come from interactions with faculty and fellow students. It’s all part of what contributes to their success.”

Mock cites Student Affairs programs such as Fusion and DanceBlue as helping to attract and retain top students. “Service learning is important at UK and Student Affairs is on the front edge of that,” he says. Programs like UK 101, the common reading experience, and the many activities available through the Student Activities Board all make a difference in making students feel welcome and involved at UK. “There is always something going on, and the students know that,” says Mock.

Another key offering is the Education Abroad program, which allows students the opportunity to gain international knowledge, experience and skills for a



Photo: Courtesy of UKPR

### Current students lead prospective students on a tour of campus, an important factor in many prospective students' decisions to attend UK.

more global perspective and a competitive edge in the world economy. Tony Ogden, director of Education Abroad at UK explains that an international perspective is not only an important component of a student’s curriculum, but an essential one.

“It’s not about why you should study abroad, or where should you study abroad — it’s about what and when and how you will study abroad,” says Ogden. UK is making this easier by integrating education abroad into the curriculum. “There is not a job out there that does not include some international focus,” says Ogden. “Going forward, we’re developing curriculum ad-

vising sheets that won’t say, ‘where do you want to go?’ but ‘what is your major?’ to help students map out particular programs abroad that will benefit them best.”

In the end, it’s more about the experience than anything else. Students are drawn to UK because they see that those affiliated with this top ranked institution are truly going places. Faculty and staff know that the student body is the university’s greatest asset and that they are the stewards of that asset. “There’s a tangible energy about UK,” says Witt. “It’s an exciting time to be a student here and it’s an exciting time to be an alum of the University of Kentucky.” ■

### Diversity recruitment yields quality students

When it comes to attracting more top ranked students to UK, excellent examples of the university’s efforts can be found in diversity recruitment. “Among our biggest efforts are the ‘Come See For Yourself’ events,” says Buzz Burnam, director of Recruitment, Diversity Initiatives in the Office of Undergraduate Admission & Registrar. “They are opportunities for diverse students to find out for themselves, rather than through hearsay, what UK has to offer and what it takes to be considered for admission.” Burnam says the six-week Freshman Summer Program for diverse students also helps students get a head start on college in the fall. “A higher percentage of the students enrolled in the Freshman Summer Program are more likely to graduate in four years,” he says. Several scholarships also exist, such as the William C. Parker Scholarship, a renewable scholarship to assist diverse students with the cost of attending the university.

Alumni are also helping through letter writing campaigns directed at African-American students and African-American Admitted Student Receptions held each spring to encourage students to go through with enrollment. The extra efforts seem to be paying off. “Over the past few years, the University of Kentucky has experienced record-setting enrollments, including significant increases in our diversity enrollment and overall academic quality of our freshman cohorts,” says Brian Troyer, associate director of Undergraduate Admission at UK.