

From: [Office of the Provost](#)
To: [All KU Lawrence and Edwards Students](#); [KU Lawrence All Staff, Faculty and Affiliates](#)
Subject: Positioning for the Long Haul
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Positioning for the Long Haul

Dear students, staff, and faculty,

About 10 weeks ago, at the end of my first week as provost, Chancellor Girod and I shared a framework for our strategic plan to ensure the University of Kansas survives long into the future, and moreover that it thrives and gains in prestige and stature. Our vision is to be an exceptional learning community that lifts each other and advances society. We will accomplish our vision through our tripartite mission of educating leaders, building healthy communities and making discoveries that change the world. We named the framework “Jayhawks Rising.”

Connections Beyond Boundaries

How prescient. Two and a half months later, we indeed find ourselves – Jayhawks – beginning to rise from the greatest challenge most of us have ever experienced. The Covid-19 pandemic has required us to think of the Jayhawk community in new ways. We are redefining what constitutes a community, both in terms of safety and a sense of place. Although physically separated, in some cases by oceans, we’ve worked to maintain our ties and continue our learning and instruction. We’ve had to address the undeniable mental, emotional, physical and financial toll of this pandemic on many members of our community and society.

Our mission and our vision are exactly what are required to rise to this occasion. The pandemic has simply forced us to think more broadly as we respond to Covid-19, with urgency and greater ingenuity and consideration for others.

Where We Find Ourselves

When I re-joined the university community at the end of February, I shared with you my thoughts on what it means to be a Jayhawk. We are innovators and trendsetters. We push the boundaries and find our way through whatever challenge confronts us. I believe the boundaries that limit us now are ones we can overcome, although I know it won’t be easy.

As a major residential research university, we have generally viewed our past, present and future connected to a location – a campus with distinct borders and landmarks. What we know now is that physical location is only one facet of our complex network of global impact. Our institution is actually formed and maintained through relationships – to our classmates, to our teachers and mentors, to the staff who support us, to our colleagues, lab partners, co-workers and students. To truly succeed as a university now and in the future, we must immediately move beyond thinking of our work as an obligation to a particular geographic place, and embrace and enhance the sense of community that originated among our people in KU's classrooms, labs, libraries, unions and student housing, and now emanates from the hub that is Mr. Oread throughout the Jayhawk community that is worldwide, and linked by our shared sense of purpose and demonstrated by our shared commitment to each other as we continue to learn and work together in service of greater society.

Our strength as a university – the value our students get from attending KU – comes largely from the networks they establish here, networks with faculty, networks with staff, networks with peers, networks establish through events and co-curricular activities and student organizations. KU has always been, at core, a network of networks, and we are that now more than ever. Now is the time to recognize this fact as a core of our strength, as we re-think every aspect of our organization – policies, processes, systems and structures – to better support this fundamental aspect of our nature and to ensure that our networks have the global reach to engage Jayhawks wherever they may be.

Ultimately, we need to re-think the very language we use to define ourselves. As we continue to build a community here, we need to acknowledge that “here” is wherever our people find themselves. This is how we succeed – both as individuals and as an institution, and it is how we become the exceptional learning community we aspire to be.

Controlling our Controllables

Despite all the effort we've given so far, there's still more work to do. The impact of COVID-19 will be with us for many months, and likely years. We can't control what coronavirus will do. We can control how we prepare for its impact on higher education. To rise now, we need to ensure students choose to connect with us in the fall – in whatever way is safe and that works for them.

Over the summer, we'll be engaging in a number of initiatives that will lay the foundation for our future. Two initiatives are critically important to building the foundation for our new identity, our new spirit of community, and our new sense of place, helping us move beyond previous limitations exposed by the pandemic.

First, in conjunction with KU Information Technology, we will launch the Jayhawk Cloud through Microsoft Teams. The platform promises to help us establish a new community, untethered to place, that allows us to connect, communicate, share and collaborate, so that no matter where Jayhawks are, they can engage in activities, events, and organizations – to meet each other and be in community – in cloud-based places.

Equally important, we'll also engage KU faculty with professional development resources to help them retool their courses for fall and beyond, to ensure they are highly engaging to our students whether they are in our classrooms on campus or in the cloud. Knowing that many members of our Jayhawk community are, at minimum, facing travel restrictions, health concerns, personal responsibilities or financial challenges that will keep them from attending in-person classes; knowing that our faculty could be quarantined at any time; and knowing that epidemiological models show we can expect ongoing long-range effects of coronavirus, we simply must begin preparing now to reach and engage each and every student through technology-based platforms. We must prepare for courses as well as for advising, for co-curricular activities, for every element of the educational experience - and to do so in a manner that provides the exceptional value KU has long been known to provide in our academic programs. The best education has always been a bridge - a bridge between the skills students have and the skills they need, a bridge between where students are and where they aspire to go, a bridge between the present and the future. As educators, it is our duty and our responsibility now to build a better bridge - one that extends farther and wider than ever before - to reach our students wherever they may be. It's also our best shot at rising above the fiscal challenges of COVID-19 and a rapidly changing world.

Crash Course in Perseverance

The spring 2020 semester has been full of chaos and uncertainty and fear and anxiety. The days are getting a little longer and a little sunnier, and we are gaining some clarity about the situation we're facing. We want to believe the end of this crisis is near. We are starting to turn our attention from crisis management to recovery. As we begin this work, it's important to acknowledge our recovery experience is going to be costly and difficult and will take time. COVID-19 has exposed previous limitations and created new challenges, and it's imperative that each of us continues to do what we can to reshape KU into the university it needs to be to ensure it sustains and thrives well into the future. We must learn, we must adopt new technologies, we must keep ceaseless focus on our missions of learning and teaching, discovery and service. We will do well to be ever-mindful and grateful for the power of community.

KU is a beautiful place, both in the geographical sense and in our people's expression of our goals. We marvel and revel in our students' growth, our faculty's discovery, our staff's spirit of service, and of our community's accomplishments. We look forward to the day when it's safer for anyone to come back to the physical campus, and we certainly hope everyone will do so. Until then, I will do my part to support all Jayhawks - students, staff and faculty - to learn to use the multitude of tools at our disposal to keep us all connected to and engaged with each other in the learning, discovery and work that are the lifeblood of the university - as this is what it means, to me, to be an exceptional learning community.

Jayhawks, thank you so much for your love of this place and our people. Thank you for your stewardship, your dedication, your resilience and your perseverance. I know this spring has not been easy, and I'm sure the months

ahead will be challenging as well, in ways we cannot yet know or understand. The one thing I am most certain of now is that we will rise to this challenge and we will turn adversity into opportunity.

As we make our way past finals, we will be sending out an email with details about summer activities, planning for fall semester, and fiscal recovery. I look forward to working with you to design our future.

Respectfully,

Barbara Bichelmeyer

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Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor

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