Postbaccalaureate Program Expansion Feasibility Study

Directed by SJR 170

Contracted by Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Prepared by Deloitte Consulting

Executive Summary

Interim Joint Committee on Education

December 10, 2024

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Scope of Study

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SJR 170 Study Overview

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) contracted with Deloitte Consulting between August and November 2024 to conduct four feasibility studies and offer recommendation regarding the new program approval process going forward.

The study evaluates the feasibility of launching these four new postbaccalaureate programs:

A doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in **osteopathic medicine (DO)** at **Eastern Kentucky University**

One or more PhD programs leading to an **R2 "High Research Activity" designation** from the Carnegie Classification at **Western Kentucky University**

A doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in **veterinary medicine (DVM)** at **Murray State University**

A **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** in Integrated Agroecology and Sustainable Agriculture at **Kentucky State University**

The study also offers recommendations to CPE and policy leaders regarding the evaluation and approval of future program proposals.

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Eastern Kentucky University Proposal Overview

Proposal and Institution Overview

Institutional Background

- Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) is a regional public institution located in Richmond, Kentucky, with a headcount enrollment of nearly 14,000 undergraduate and graduate students[1].
- EKU has proposed opening a doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in osteopathic medicine (DO). This would be the second DO school in Kentucky and the first to be offered by a public institution. Kentucky currently has two MD programs at the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville.

Institutional Motivating Factors

- Help address the growing shortage of physicians at both the national and state levels.
- Provide opportunities for members of Kentucky's regional and rural communities to obtain a medical education, enabling them to return and practice in areas with the direst need for primary care physicians.
- Enhance the institution's brand by expanding its academic offerings, thereby attracting a wider pool of students and faculty.
- Increase institutional revenue with the expected high margins of a DO program.

What is Osteopathic Medicine?

A College of Osteopathic Medicine (COM) produces Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DOs), who take a holistic, patient-centered approach focusing on preventive health care and nutrition. This contrasts with an allopathic medical school, which produces Medical Doctors (MDs) and emphasizes diagnosing and treating medical conditions. Both programs share similar application requirements and curricular structures, though most DO graduates tend to practice in primary care settings while more MD graduates go into medical specialties. Notably, most COMs employ a distributive model of clinical education that sends students into community hospitals, clinics, and other medical facilities for clinical rotations in their third and fourth years, while allopathic medical schools have affiliated teaching hospitals where students complete their clinical education.

Fast Facts[2]

Fall 2028
Target Program Launch Date

150
Target Cohort Size by Year 5

600
Target Enrollment by Year 5

19
Estimated New Faculty Hired by Year 5

62
Estimated New Staff and Administrators by Year 5

Notes: 1) Enrollment headcounts exclude Dual Credit students; 2) Faculty and staff estimates are based on peer analysis and are subject to change. Sources: EKU stakeholder interviews, proposal, and related materials; KY CPE Data Center.

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Murray State University Proposal Overview

Proposal and Institution Overview

Institutional Background

- Murray State University (Murray State) is a regional public institution located in Murray, Kentucky, with a headcount enrollment of nearly 9,000 undergraduate and graduate students[1].
- Murray State has proposed a doctoral program for professional practice and licensure in veterinary medicine, utilizing a distributive model for veterinary education. This would be the first veterinary medical (DVM) program in Kentucky.

Institutional Motivating Factors

- Help address the shortage of rural veterinarians at both the national and state levels and support Kentucky's agriculture industry.
- Provide opportunities for members of Kentucky's regional and rural communities to obtain a veterinary education close to home and offer their existing pre-veterinary students an opportunity to continue their studies.
- Leverage existing agriculture school's facilities (e.g., Breathitt Veterinary Center) to expand veterinary education.

What is a Distributive Model of Veterinary Medicine?

In a distributive model of veterinary education, veterinary students complete their core science, anatomy, and pre-clinical skills curricular requirements in a traditional classroom setting on-campus and complete their clinical education with a distributed network of clinical partners, including private practices, urgent care clinics, emergency clinics, referral hospitals, shelters, zoos, and wildlife rehabilitation centers. This contrasts with a traditional model of veterinary education, where Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) students complete most of their clinical education in affiliated teaching hospitals.

Fast Facts[2]

Fall 2027
Target Program Launch Date

70
Target Cohort Size by Year 5

280
Target Enrollment by Year 5

15
Estimated Incremental Faculty by Year 5

42
Estimated Staff and Administrators by Year 5

Notes: 1) Enrollment headcounts exclude Dual Credit students; 2) Faculty and staff estimates are based on peer analysis and are subject to change. Faculty count includes current Murray State faculty who may teach in the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM). Sources: Murray State stakeholder interviews, proposal, and related materials; KY CPE Data Center.

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Western Kentucky University Proposal Overview

Proposal and Institution Overview

Institutional Background

- Western Kentucky University (WKU) is a regional, comprehensive university located in Bowling Green, KY serving nearly 14,500 undergraduate and graduate students[1]. WKU's current Carnegie Classification is Doctoral Universities: Doctoral/Professional Universities.
- WKU leadership has proposed launching one or more doctoral research programs in pursuit of a Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity (R2) Carnegie Classification.[2] There are currently no R2 universities in Kentucky. WKU leadership have identified a PhD in Data Sciences as the likely first program launched should their R2 proposal be approved.

Institutional Motivating Factors

- Recognize past research achievements and reinforce WKU's strategic commitment to advancing education through research-driven undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Enhance and elevate the university's profile and attract high-quality faculty and students and external funding.
- Capitalize on economic growth in region, particularly in labor-aligned fields such as data sciences, to serve the needs of the Commonwealth and drive increased economic development in Bowling Green.

What is an R2 Carnegie Classification?

The Carnegie Classification system was originally developed to support higher education research, but were recently revamped out of concerns that, in some cases "the chase for an R1 or R2 designation may come at the expense of an institution's core missions, like service to the community and undergraduate instruction."[3] Classifications are released every three years (next in 2025) and are based on a) three-year rolling average data or b) most recent year data. **To achieve R2 status, a university must confer a minimum of 20 doctoral research degrees[4] and a minimum $5M in total research expenditures**.

Fast Facts[5]

Fall 2026
Target Data Sciences PhD Program Launch Date[2]

29
Target Data Sciences PhD Enrollment by Year 5

2
Estimated Number of New Data Sciences Program Faculty by Year 5

Notes: 1) Enrollment headcounts exclude Dual Credit students; 2) As of 2025 this will be retitled to "R2: High Research Spending and Doctorate Production;" 3) Reimagining the Carnegie Classifications: A Q&A; 4) Doctoral research degrees as defined by National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS data; 5) Fast Facts represent the PhD in Data Sciences program. WKU has proposed three additional programs proposed for launch by 2030, but details on target enrollment and number of faculty hires have not yet been finalized. Sources: Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education 2025 Research Designations; 2025 Research Designation FAQs; KY CPE Data Center; Reimagining the Carnegie Classifications: A Q&A; WKU stakeholder interviews, proposal, and related materials.

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Kentucky State University Proposal Overview

Proposal and Institution Overview

Institutional Background

- Kentucky State University (KSU) is a regional, comprehensive university located in Frankfort, KY serving over 1,400 undergraduate and graduate students.[1] KSU's current Carnegie Classification is Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields. KSU is one of two land-grant institutions in Kentucky.
- Land-grant institutions were established to expand agricultural and technical education and access to such education. KSU is also one of two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in Kentucky. HBCU's are institutions "established prior to 1964 with the primary mission of educating Black Americans."
- KSU leadership has proposed launching a PhD in Integrated Agroecology and Sustainable Agriculture. This would be the first doctoral program of its kind in Kentucky, although related doctoral programs in agriculture and sustainability exist.

Institutional Motivating Factors

- Expand access to agriculture, environment, and data sciences PhD programs for traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Maximize KSU's existing high levels of research and grant funding and elevate awareness of KSU's research profile.
- Capitalize on institutions strengths in Environmental Studies, Aquaculture, and other agriculture programs.

What is Integrated Agroecology?

KSU's proposal highlights that Integrated Agroecology and Sustainable Agriculture focuses on advanced teaching and research on agricultural principles and practices with the goal of long-run enhancements to agricultural production, environmental quality, nonrenewable resource management. The program is designed to prepare a specialized workforce to ensure a viable and socially responsible economy for the citizens of Commonwealth. Agroecology is the integrative study of the nexus of plants, animals, soil, environment, and humans. Balancing the relationship among these components is imperative for sustainable agriculture production.

Fast Facts

Fall 2025
Target Program Launch Date

20
Target Enrollment by Year 5

4
Estimated Number of New Faculty by Year 5

Note: 1) Enrollment headcounts exclude Dual Credit students. Sources: Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities; KY CPE Data Center; KSU stakeholder interviews, proposal, and related materials; NCES Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Approach and Methodology

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Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles formed the foundation of our approach, ensuring rigor and objectivity throughout our feasibility study.

Guiding Principle	Description
School-Level Collaboration Balanced with Evidence-Based Independence	• Actively engaged university leadership throughout the analysis for their input and awareness. • Maintained the overall validity and independence of the analysis by mapping final conclusions to validated and reputable data sources.
Holistic and Comprehensive Assessment	• Considered an expansive array of feasibility metrics, both quantitative and qualitative. • Provided decision-makers with a comprehensive understanding of the proposals under review.
Consistent Approach while Considering University Specifics	• Applied a consistent overarching approach to all feasibility studies while independently evaluating each institution's unique attributes and contexts.
Stakeholder Viewpoints	• Included diverse stakeholder perspectives in the assessment. • Developed a holistic understanding of the program proposals, processes, and statutes under consideration.
Forward-Thinking Perspective	• Reviewed the programs, processes, and statutes reviewed from the perspective of both the current and future operating environment. • Considered expected future changes in the higher education ecosystem.
Materiality of Impact	• Prioritized attention on analysis elements that significantly impact feasibility outcomes, engaging in deeper analysis for high impact areas.
Balanced Focus on Kentucky Needs and University Goals	• Dedicated to understanding how proposals could help to address the needs of the Kentucky Commonwealth as well as unique goals of individual universities.

Feasibility Study Methodology | Qualitative Inputs

The project team engaged with a diverse range of internal and external stakeholders, including academic and administrative leaders, government officials, industry professionals, and peer institution leaders, to gather comprehensive feedback and insights.

75

UNIVERSITY FACULTY, STAFF, ADMINISTRATORS

Engaged with 75+ academic and administrative leaders (including provosts, deans, and faculty and staff representatives) through on-campus and virtual meetings.

11

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS AND CPE LEADERSHIP

Met with each university president to discuss the vision and strategy for the new programs of study at their institution. Led seven interviews with CPE leaders and maintained regular communication with CPE through weekly status calls to promote alignment and transparency.

5

ON-SITE VISITS

Visited all four campuses as well as CPE in person to gain first-hand perspective to each campus, visiting relevant facilities and engaging with key stakeholders where possible.

12

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

Engaged with more than twelve Kentucky government officials, including state Senators, Representatives, the Warren County Judge/Executive, the Governor's office, and the Bowling Green Chamber of Commerce.

7

PEER INSTITUTIONS

Conducted seven interviews with leaders from other Kentucky universities (UK, KCTCS, Morehead) and peer institutions (Auburn, LMU, Texas Tech, UMES) to gain perspectives, financial benchmarks, and lessons learned. Benchmarked against 100+ additional peer institutions using publicly available data.

9

INDUSTRY LEADERS AND EMPLOYERS

Met with leaders from industry associations, reviewed letters from interested industry practitioners, and engaged with potential employers and clinical partners.

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Feasibility Study Methodology | Quantitative Inputs

The project team conducted a thorough review of internal documents and data, alongside external benchmarks and trends, to independently validate institutional assumptions and provide a comprehensive feasibility evaluation.

University Provided

Reviewed 220+ documents from CPE, EKU, KSU, Murray State, and WKU, covering academic, student, financial, strategic, personnel/employee, and facilities data (e.g., strategic plans, feasibility studies, program proposals, organizational charts, university policies). Analyzed CPE's Interactive Data Center for **publicly reported data** on enrollment, academic, and student success metrics.

Data Categories

- ❑ Enrollment Data
- ❑ Financial Data
- ❑ Student Success Data
- ❑ Salaries Data
- ❑ Program Budget Projections

External Sources

Validated institutional assumptions by reviewing agency reports (e.g., credit agencies, government entities) as well as accreditation standards, policies, and requirements from COCA[1], AVMA[2], and SACSCOC[3]. Researched **peer benchmarking data** for projections using reputable sources and insights from external stakeholder interviews.

Data Categories

- ❑ Demographic Data
- ❑ Labor Market Data
- ❑ Peer Institutional Benchmarks
- ❑ Kentucky Performance Funding Model Data
- ❑ Industry Association Data
- ❑ Accreditation Requirements

Notes: 1) Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA); 2) American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA); 3) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

Feasibility Study Methodology | Program Evaluation Criteria

The project team evaluated the feasibility of each program proposal across nine dimensions in alignment with SJR 170. Each feasibility study in this report is organized around these nine criteria, found below.

SJR-170 Required Current State Considerations

Financial Health

The institution's **recent financial performance** as measured by net operating margins, balance sheet ratios, capital expenditures, and Composite Financial Index (CFI).

Research Infrastructure

The **sufficiency of research facilities**, funding availability, and institutional support for faculty and student research initiatives.

Student Success

The institution's **historical performance** on student success outcomes, such as graduation rates, retention rates, and performance funding metrics.

Faculty Recruitment

The institution's ability **to attract and retain** qualified faculty members.

Workforce Alignment

The alignment of academic programs with current and future workforce needs, **including partnerships with industry** and employment opportunities for graduates.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

The costs associated with **launching and operating** new programs relative to the expected returns on investment.

Student Demand

The current and projected student interest and **enrollment trends** for specific programs or fields of study.

Accreditation Standards

The institution's ability to meet the **standards and requirements**, necessary to obtain and maintain program accreditation.

Clinical Placements

The availability and quality of clinical placement **opportunities for students** in programs that require hands-on, practical experience.

Summary of Findings

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Feasibility Assessment: Eastern Kentucky University

Eastern Kentucky University has proposed launching a new college of osteopathic medical (COM) with a target enrollment of 150 students per cohort, with new cohorts starting annually in 2028.

SJR-170 Required Current State Considerations

Financial Health	Y	EKU's financial health assessment surfaced some risks from elevated debt levels that could jeopardize their ability to access funding and manage a significant new financial investment.
Student Success	G	EKU currently outperforms other Kentucky regional comprehensives on first-time, full-time student retention. EKU has performed better than other KY public comprehensive institutions on five out of nine metrics tracked in the comprehensive funding model in the last five years.
Research Infrastructure	Y	EKU's current research expenditures are low relative to the other KY comprehensive universities, though it has foundational infrastructure to support research growth, including a dedicated Office of Sponsored Programs.
Cost-Benefit Analysis	G	The proposed EKU COM is resource-intensive but projected to generate surpluses under both moderate and conservative planning assumptions by FY31 without ongoing state support and is anticipated to generate significant economic impact in Madison County and KY more broadly.

Overall Feasibility Assessment: While some feasibility concerns are noted, many of these concerns would be present at any institution planning to launch a COM given the significant financial and reputational risk that such an endeavor carries. If given permission to pursue the COM, EKU will need to carefully manage its balance sheet to ensure access to necessary capital, to plan to offer faculty salaries that exceed its current salary levels to attract faculty, to cultivate and manage an extensive network of clinical partners, and to invest in research infrastructure to meet accreditation standards for scholarly activity.

Student Demand	G	Student demand for seats in COMs is high, even amid growth in the program pipeline as new COMs launch.
Workforce Alignment	G	By producing more physicians, many of whom would be expected to go into primary care, the EKU COM could address the current shortage of primary care physicians in eastern KY and the Commonwealth more broadly.
Faculty Recruitment	Y	Peer COM benchmarks suggest that EKU will need to offer salaries that far exceed their current average faculty salary levels to compete for medical faculty.
Accreditation Standards	Y	Per accreditation guidelines, EKU will need to hold approximately $48.75M in reserves until it graduates its first class, which EKU plans to ask the state legislature to fund. EKU will also need to grow research infrastructure and ensure quality across clinical education sites to maintain accreditation, requiring significant new investments.
Clinical Placements	Y	Several regional healthcare leaders, including Baptist Health Richmond, ARH, and CHI St. Joseph, have expressed interest in providing clinical education to EKU COM students, documented in letters of support, though evidence of an anchor partner or sufficient clinical capacity could not be validated.

Assessment Key

G No/few feasibility concerns Y Some feasibility concerns R Significant feasibility concerns

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Feasibility Assessment: Murray State University

Murray State University has proposed launching a new college of veterinary medicine (CVM) with a target enrollment of 70 students per cohort, with new cohorts starting annually in 2027.

SJR-170 Required Current State Considerations

Financial Health	G	Murray State's financial health assessment points to strong financial management practices and a healthy balance sheet. Financial pressures observed (e.g., slowed tuition revenue growth) are common across public higher education.
Student Success	G	Murray State's undergraduate retention rates and six-year graduation rates have consistently outperformed their peer group average, and Murray State has performed better than or equivalent to other KY public comprehensive institutions on 8 of 9 metrics tracked in the KY performance funding model.
Research Infrastructure	G	Murray State's research expenditures are comparable to the other KY regional comprehensives and have grown by ~30% across the last five years. Murray State also possesses veterinary research equipment in their Breathitt Veterinary Center and other facilities.
Cost-Benefit Analysis	Y	Murray State's CVM is projected to break-even under moderate planning assumptions in FY30 without ongoing state support and anticipated to generate significant economic impact in Calloway County and KY. Murray State's existing faculty and infrastructure in animal sciences offset some of the significant startup costs.
Student Demand	G	Student demand for seats in DVM programs is high, even amid growth in the program pipeline as new CVMs launch.
Workforce Alignment	Y	Industry experts disagree about the demand for new veterinarians at the national level, though there is an undisputed shortage of rural large animal vets in KY. Some experts purport that a CVM cannot meaningfully address the rural shortage, though Murray State has a record of successfully placing graduates in rural settings.
Faculty Recruitment	Y	There is presently a shortage of veterinary faculty in the US, which is positioned to worsen as planned new vet schools launch in the next decade. Murray State has several existing veterinary faculty on staff who can teach in this program, mitigating the risk.
Accreditation Standards	Y	To meet accreditation standards, Murray State will need to invest significantly to provide sufficient facilities for the housing of animals used in teaching and research, to satisfactorily produce substantial related research, and to ensure quality of education and facilities at distributed clinical sites.
Clinical Placements	Y	In a KVMA[1] survey, over 170 veterinarians across KY expressed interest in supporting clinical education for Murray State students, though a distributive clinical education model requires an expansive partner network, and Murray State may need to look out of state to fulfill its needs, particularly for veterinary specialties.

Overall Feasibility Assessment: Murray State has a strong foundation upon which to build a new CVM, including strong institutional finances, existing facilities and expertise in animal sciences, and the proposed CVM would contribute positively to the state and local economy. However, opposition from the veterinary industry in KY could hamper their pursuit, calling into question the alignment of this program with state workforce needs, particularly considering the perceived effectiveness of existing pathways for KY residents to pursue vet education. Faculty recruitment also poses a risk due to current industry shortages.

Assessment Key

G No/few feasibility concerns Y Some feasibility concerns R Significant feasibility concerns

Note: 1) Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association (KVMA)

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Feasibility Assessment: Western Kentucky University

Western Kentucky University has proposed launching one or more doctoral research degrees, starting with a PhD in Data Sciences, with the goal of achieving an R2 (High Research) Carnegie Classification. PhD in Data Sciences is proposed to launch in Fall 2026 with six students.

SJR-170 Required Current State Considerations

Financial Health	Y	**R2**: Risks from declining operating revenues and rising expenses as identified in WKU's financial health assessment raise some concerns over the institution's long-term ability to fund the pursuit of new initiatives.
Student Success	G	**R2**: WKU's graduation and retention rates rank above the average for comprehensive four-year institutions in KY. In 2022, WKU's first-year retention rate was 77% and six-year graduation rate was 54%.
Research Infrastructure	G	**R2**: WKU has taken several intentional steps to lay the foundation for increased research, including expanded central research staffing and trainings, budget allocations to provide research seed funding, and refining faculty workload policies.
Cost-Benefit Analysis	Y	**Data Sciences PhD**: Like most PhD programs, WKU's PhD in Data Sciences is not expected to generate net surplus, but the program will require relatively limited institutional investment to support operational expenses given the small program size and existing infrastructure.

Overall Feasibility Assessment: PhDs offered in pursuit of R2 will not generate net surplus (like most PhD programs); each will require a relatively small, but sustained, institutional investment. New PhDs and R2 status could benefit KY via industry partnerships and expanded access to research for citizens. It could elevate WKU's profile beyond KY as well. WKU's intentional approach to expanding research infrastructure supports feasibility, but enrollment declines and expense growth raise some concerns about long-term financial management. Data Sciences is a sound choice for first research PhD given growing enrollment and labor market.

Student Demand	G	**Data Sciences PhD**: Nationally, program conferrals in Data Sciences and related fields across levels increased from 2020 to 2023. Doctoral programs represent a small but growing enrollment market, with just 14 conferrals in 2023 (33% CAGR 2020-2023).
Workforce Alignment	G	**Data Sciences PhD**: Data Sciences occupations in Kentucky have grown steadily over the past five years (1.5% CAGR 2018-23), outpacing overall occupation growth in Kentucky, with growth projected over the next decade.
Faculty Recruitment	G	**Data Sciences PhD**: WKU is planning a relatively small number of faculty hires (two new faculty in first five years), which limits faculty recruitment risks. Proposed salaries are in line with average faculty salaries at KY comprehensive peers.
Accreditation Standards	G	**Data Sciences PhD**: Approval of new doctoral programs, including Data Sciences PhD, will require review and approval by SACSCOC[1] under the Substantive Changes process.
Clinical Placements	◌	Not Applicable

Assessment Key

G No/few feasibility concerns Y Some feasibility concerns R Significant feasibility concerns

Note: 1) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

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Feasibility Assessment: Kentucky State University

Kentucky State University, a land-grant and HBCU, has proposed launching a PhD in Integrated Agroecology in Fall 2025 with an inaugural cohort of fifteen students to expand on institutional strengths in agriculture-related disciplines.

SJR-170 Required Current State Considerations

Financial Health	R	Although KSU is showing some signs of financial improvement, including progress on its Management Improvement Plan to address cash flow and financial policy concerns, ongoing financial issues may provide an unsteady foundation from which to launch a new endeavor such as research PhDs.
Student Success	R	KSU has the lowest first-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates of KY four-year public universities. Six-year graduation rates have improved from 18% in 2018 to 33% in 2022 but remain below the KY comprehensives average.
Research Infrastructure	G	Thanks in part to its access to land-grant funding and ongoing faculty research contributions, KSU's research expenses far exceed its Kentucky comprehensive peers.[1] Recent investments in the Office of Sponsored Research and facilities also supports viability of Integrated Agroecology PhD.
Cost-Benefit Analysis	Y	Like most PhD programs, the Agroecology PhD is not expected to generate net surplus. However, the program will require a relatively limited institutional investment to support operational expenses given the small program size and existing infrastructure.

Student Demand	G	PhD in Integrated Agroecology capitalizes on institutional strengths, both in enrollment pipeline and strategic alignment between agriculture and land-grant status. Enrollment in KSU's School of Agriculture & Natural Resources grew by 112% from 2019 to 2023.
Workforce Alignment	G	PhD in Integrated Agroecology aligns with Kentucky employment in the agriculture industry. The PhD program prepares students for industry employment (direct workforce impact) as well as academia (indirect workforce impact via research and innovation).
Faculty Recruitment	G	The relatively small number of planned faculty hires (four by Year 5) limits faculty recruitment risks. Proposed salaries exceed average faculty salaries at peer colleges and universities, which may further ease recruitment and hiring.
Accreditation Standards	G	Approval of the PhD in Integrated Agroecology will require review and approval by SACSCOC[1] under the Substantive Changes process.
Clinical Placements	○	Not Applicable

Overall Feasibility Assessment: KSU's proposed PhD in Integrated Agroecology would grow an area of strength for KSU in a key industry for KY. However, significant concerns remain about KSU's ability to launch this new program without jeopardizing the institution's commitment to undergraduate success and ongoing financial stability, given the institution's historical financial and student success challenges.

Assessment Key

G No/few feasibility concerns Y Some feasibility concerns R Significant feasibility concerns

Note: 1) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relevant Powers & Duties of CPE

Denotes duties and responsibilities related to the scope of SJR 170

To ensure a well-coordinated and efficient public postsecondary education system, CPE's statutory duties outlined by KRS 164.020 include, among other duties, overseeing the strategic agenda, leading the budget process, and approving academic programming.

CPE | Select Relevant Duties & Responsibilities (Representative, Not Exhaustive)

Strategic Agenda

"Develop and implement the strategic agenda… Revise the strategic agenda and strategic implementation plans based on the strategic agenda…"

Budget & Funding Model

"Lead and provide staff support for the biennial budget process as provided under KRS Chapter 48, in cooperation with the committee…"

Academic Programming

"Define and approve the offering of all postsecondary education…degree, certificate, or diploma programs in the public postsecondary education institutions…Eliminate, in its discretion, existing programs or make any changes in existing academic programs…"

Tuition & Admissions

"Determine tuition and approve the minimum qualifications for admission to the state postsecondary educational system."

Institutional Missions

"Review, revise, and approve the missions of the state's universities and the KCTCS… [CPE] shall have the final authority to determine the compliance of postsecondary institutions with their academic services, and research missions."

Policy Guidance

"Devise, establish, and periodically review and revise policies to be used in making recommendations ot the Governor for consideration in developing recommendations to the General Assembly for appropriations to the universities…"

Technology Management

"Ensure the coordination, transferability, and connectivity of technology among postsecondary institutions…including the development and implementation of a technology plan as a component of the strategic agenda."

Data Analysis

"Engage in analyses and research to determine the overall needs of postsecondary education and adult education in the Commonwealth."

Sources: About the Council: Who We Are - Ky. Council on Postsecondary Education, The Council's Role and Responsibilities (Handout), KRS 164.020.

KRS 164.295: History of Statutes Governing Comprehensive Universities

The legislation created in the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act has been amended several times across the past two decades to incrementally expand the scope of comprehensive universities.

Each Senate Bill Amends KRs 164.295

1997

Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act

Included **KRS 164.295** which outlined which programs the six comprehensive state universities could provide, including **graduate programs with CPE's approval.**

2010

SB 127

Allowed comprehensive universities to offer **advanced practice doctoral (APD) degrees in nursing.**

2011

SB 130

Permitted comprehensive universities to offer up to **three APD degree programs** and an **Ed.D program,** specifying that comprehensive universities are **not allowed** to offer "first professional degrees" in medicine.

2012

SB 131

Removed the limit of three APDs and one Ed.D at individual institutions and set **a maximum of eighteen total advanced practice doctorates and Ed.Ds** for the six comprehensive universities, with at least two available for each institution.

2017

SB 147

Removed the cap of eighteen total APDs and Ed.Ds for comprehensive universities. Also removed "first professional degree" language and changed it to **doctoral degrees "required for professional practice and licensure…"** in fields including medicine and veterinary medicine.

These incremental changes to KRS 164.295, driven by individual institutions' interest in expanding program offerings, have **blurred the lines between the missions of higher education institutions in Kentucky** (research vs. comprehensive), contributed to an **unpredictable strategic environment**, and **created confusion around roles and responsibilities** for program review and approval at public institutions in Kentucky.

Sources: KRS 164.295; Chapter 80 (SB 127); CHAPTER 94 (SB 130); CHAPTER 29 (SB 131); CHAPTER 51 (SB 147, Givens and Wilson).

Legislative Recommendations

Legislative changes may be necessary to address the outcomes of the SJR 170 study. Moreover, the coordinating entity (CPE) should continue to be empowered to review and approve academic program decisions in the future, consistent with statute and in alignment with leading practices.

Clarify the Missions of Public Institutions in Statute *(SJR 170 Outcomes Dependent)*

- The missions of KY's public institutions may need to be reconsidered based on not only the outcomes of SJR 170, but also the changing nature of higher education in KY and the US more broadly.
- Statutory language should broadly set the mission for each institution, clarifying its place in the commonwealth, particularly with regards to research and doctoral programs, providing each institution with clarity, differentiation, and opportunities to innovate.

Ensure that the Coordinating Entity (CPE) is empowered to carry out its statutory role of defining and approving all academic programs

- With statute broadly defining mission for each institution, CPE should continue to be empowered to efficiently and effectively approve individual program proposals, as statute dictates.
- A clear separation of duties between the legislature and the coordinating entity is leading practice across US public higher education.
- The coordinating entity should be funded at a level that allows them to carry out their statutory responsibilities.

Sources: KRS 164.295 Programs of state and comprehensive universities -- Criteria for approval of advanced practice doctoral programs -- Review of doctorates -- Degrees a comprehensive university may not offer; KRS 164.020 Powers and duties of council.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Process Overview and Recommendations

The project team interviewed university and CPE stakeholders to surface process strengths and challenges and reviewed academic program approval processes at 45 state systems or coordinating bodies to identify leading practices and inform a set of four recommendations.

Per KRS 164.020, the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is the approving body for academic programs at Kentucky's public institutions.

CPE administers a new program approval process for all new programs that is **thorough, accessible,** and **encouraging of innovation.** CPE currently **requires additional documentation for Advanced Practice Doctorates (APD)** at comprehensive universities.

However, analysis, informed by both stakeholder feedback and industry leading practices, **surfaced several limitations of the current process, including:**

- Confusion around roles and decision-making authority
- Need for additional differentiation of process steps and external review for higher-risk proposals
- Lack of clarity around decision-making criteria
- Insufficient accountability for post-launch program performance

The following recommendations to address stakeholder concerns and improve the process are informed by benchmarking of 45 state systems' and coordinating boards' leading program review practices:

1. **Further Differentiate Proposal Requirements,** creating a different process for programs requiring "extraordinary consideration"
2. **Consider Requiring External Review,** including for proposals that deviate from an institution's historical scope or require significant financial investment
3. **Clarify Approval Criteria for Programs** to increase trust and transparency in the approval process
4. **Instill Accountability for New Program Performance,** ensuring that new programs deliver on their original goals and intent

Q&A