



PeopleGrove

# How University of Kansas scales alumni career services to their 375,000 alumni



## INSTITUTION TYPE

Public Research University



## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

400+



## LOCATION

Lawrence, Kansas



## TOTAL ENROLLMENT

28,000



## ALUMNI

375,000

## Introduction

Founded in 1865, the University of Kansas is the state's flagship university, with five campuses located across eastern and central Kansas. The spirit of campus is perhaps best exemplified through its "Rock Chalk" chant, its origins going back to the University Science Club in 1886, when a chemistry professor referenced the famous limestone of Mount Oread (where the campus was first founded).



*Students gather outside Marvin Hall during the fall semester.*

*Photo credit: University of Kansas*

## Responding to alumni needs

The University of Kansas (KU) Alumni Association advances the mission of KU by “uniting a global network of Jayhawks and increasing the value of KU degrees.” A self-governing alumni association and nonprofit, it services more than 375,000 alumni and students.

The KU Alumni Association consistently offered career development programming such as networking events and alumni panel discussions. A 2017 survey of 43,000 KU Alumni Association members indicated that career-related assistance ranked as the most important alumni benefit—and that alumni needed more opportunities beyond happy hours and panel discussions.

“Traditionally, alumni associations like ours have been known to have this “big tent” approach—come one, come all,” said David Johnston, SVP of Strategic Communications at the Alumni Association. “We’ve done really well with networking events and athletic events. But the themes we were hearing over and over again [from alumni] were around career services and mentoring.”

The University Career Center primarily focuses on helping undergraduates choose a path of study and secure job placement upon graduation. Their services extend to recent graduates as well, but largely excludes the majority of KU’s alumni population.

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**David Johnston**

SVP of Strategic Communications  
KU Alumni Association

“We approached the university and said, ‘We think there’s some value that we can add in terms of this vast Jayhawk network,’” David said. “Alumni are eager and willing to give back, and that’s what we brought to the table.”

As the Alumni Association began their partnership with PeopleGrove, they knew they wanted to provide their members with career advancement programs, including access to flexible connections, targeted networking, and traditional career services.

## Ready-made tools for mentorship and career preparation



*University of Kansas students cheer on their home team.  
Photo credit: University of Kansas*

The university launched with PeopleGrove in 2017, with the primary focus of scaling quickly. The KU team wanted to be able to expand career services to as many alumni as possible. Nearly 3,000 alumni joined the platform in the first quarter.

"We hit the switch on our platform, and overnight we had Jayhawks in our career network that we never had before," said Kristi Laclé, Senior Vice President of Operations and Programs at KU Alumni Association. "When we were onboarding and uploading data and trying to make it a user experience that made sense... PeopleGrove listened to our feedback, offered consultation and expertise, and they put us in touch with other peer institutions. That was invaluable as we were launching this platform."

The launch was promoted everywhere at KU. The Association took advantage of well-known university events like Homecoming to promote the new platform to university alumni. The Student Alumni Network (SAN) built grassroots partnerships with key student groups on campus, encouraging sign-ups and capturing recommendations for future improvements to KU Mentoring.

### **Short-Term and Long-Term Mentorship**

"Mentoring is a hard word for people," Kristi observed. "We have found on our campus that sometimes [the word] 'mentoring' resonates with an older and a more senior audience, and means something completely different to a student. So we've had to be really kind of careful and cautious of how we talk about mentoring on campus."

In response to that feedback, **KU Connect** was designed for short-term networking. Current students and alumni meet virtually for a one-time connection—typically over a call or email—whenever the need arises. Participants can find connections using criteria like Location, Major(s), Industries, Clubs, Military Affiliation, etc. The program is available to all upper- and lower-classmen year-round.

The **KU Business Mentoring Program** brings together current KU Business students and alumni to participate in a guided, structured mentor-mentee relationship. Mentees have the ability to browse available mentors and mark individuals as “Favorite.” That preference is then taken into consideration when the program administrator conducts the matching process.

“We want to allow our students the opportunity to connect with alumni, because we know that career paths are not linear,” Kristi said. “So by promoting PeopleGrove to all of our students and all of our alumni, we’ve been able to scale our mentoring network across campus and beyond the business school where we originally started.”

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**Kristi Lacle**

SVP of Operations and Programs  
KU Alumni Association

## Groups

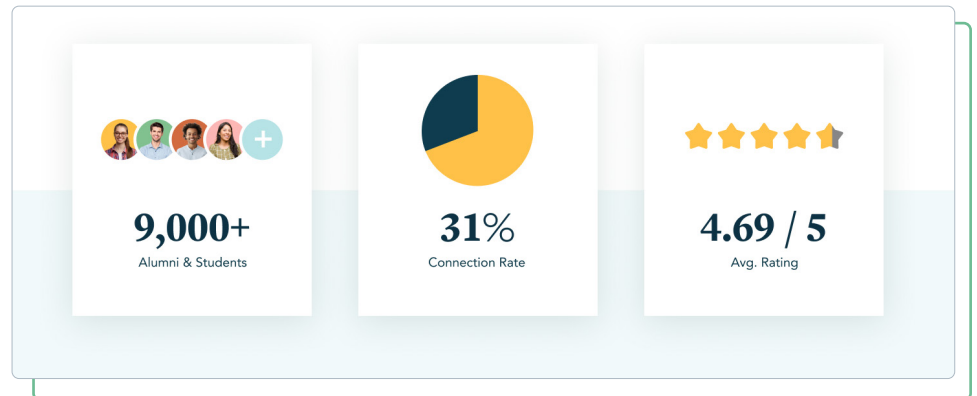
KU Mentoring supports its diverse membership with Groups inside PeopleGrove. Groups foster conversation among sub-communities within the broader KU network, with nearly 30 on the platform to date. They span a variety of interests and areas of study, and include KU Black Alumni, Jayhawks in Healthcare, Jayhawks in Sport, and others. The needs of each affinity group are unique, and Groups provide a dedicated—and in some cases, private—space for discussion and collaboration.





## Results and Evolution

Since launching KU Mentoring with PeopleGrove, more than 9,000 alumni and students have joined.



In May of 2021, the KU Alumni Association and the University of Kansas ushered in a new era of student recruitment with the groundbreaking for the new Jayhawk Welcome Center on campus. The Center will feature a display showcasing the university's alumni mentor pipeline for prospective students, populated with data from PeopleGrove.

## Mentoring and Beyond

As their platform has expanded, so has the need for a name that more accurately indicates the array of resources available to members. In June 2021, Howard Graham, Director of the Jayhawk Career Network, announced that KU Mentoring was rebranding itself to KU Mentoring+.

"While mentoring is the bedrock of the platform, users also network, look for jobs, join groups, post and answer discussion questions and learn about professional development opportunities," he stated.

"PeopleGrove is an indispensable tool because we are making connections with students and alumni like never before," said Kristi. "For us, PeopleGrove and our KU mentoring program here at the KU Alumni Association is our number one value add to our membership base and our donors who are contributing to our career services here at the alumni association."



PeopleGrove

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