Improving student engagement and data insights through a centralized, co-curricular initiative

Scrappy's Bucket List brings a new tradition to KSU, giving students a sense of belonging and the institution measurable results.

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1963, Kennesaw State is a comprehensive university located on two suburban campuses in Kennesaw and Marietta, northwest of metro Atlanta. As the third largest university in Georgia, Kennesaw State has more than 43,000 students enrolled in over 180 undergraduate, master's, doctoral degree, and certificate programs.

INSTITUTION TYPE: 4-YEAR PUBLIC

LOCATION: KENNESAW, GEORGIA AND MARIETTA, GEORGIA

STUDENT POPULATION: 43,268

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:

anthology Engage

> Scrappy's Bucket List (SBL) is a powerful tool that encourages students to engage in new experiences, connects them to resources, and cultivates their sense of belonging.

Shawanda Daniel, Program Manager of Assessment and Analysis, Kennesaw State University

anthology
Advancing Knowledge

The Challenges

The positive impact of student engagement on student success and retention is undeniable. In the fall of 2021, Kennesaw State University (KSU) began considering strategies to build engagement.

To that end, KSU formed a team led by the Division of Student Affairs to develop a program to encourage students to participate in shared experiences connected to the university and to generate a sense of belonging. KSU could then use this solution to track student engagement across campus, including the spaces students were utilizing and how often they were utilizing them.

The Solution

In 2021, Scrappy's Bucket List (SBL) was created and launched—and is quickly becoming a campus phenomenon.

Scrappy's Bucket List challenges KSU students to complete items of their choosing from a carefully curated list before they graduate. Named for KSU's mascot, Scrappy the Owl, and commemorating the anniversary of the university's founding in 1963, SBL challenges students to "Complete 63 Before Your Degree!" Students can track their progress online and earn rewards, including hats and hoodies, as they complete levels. Those completing 63 items by graduation earn graduation cords, have their names engraved on a plaque, and earn a challenge coin that can be used at alumni events to challenge other students.

The bucket list includes a broad and diverse array of events students can attend, selfies they can upload, and organizations they can join, all managed using Anthology® Engage to promote the events and record student progress.

SBL provides KSU students with a clear and accessible path to student engagement that fosters a sense of belonging and supports the institution's retention efforts.

The motto for Scrappy's Bucket List is "Tap in. Get credit. Have fun." When KSU students attend an event, they have their student ID cards out and ready to tap. "One of my favorite features is that students can see and keep up with their own path progress. We had two or three students in here the other day comparing their percentages. It really turned into fun and competitiveness for the students," said Shawanda Daniel, program manager of assessment and analysis at Kennesaw State University.

SBL not only creates a sense of belonging for enrolled students, but it also works to capture the attention of prospective students as well. Students participating in the challenge take selfies at various campus locations and can opt in for their selfies to be used on KSU's social media and marketing materials. "When other students considering Kennesaw can see that students are enjoying themselves, are being introduced to unique experiences, or are creating friends across the university, that's a good recruiting tool," said Daniel. "It creates some hype about the university, and then prospects want to be a part of something where they can see themselves or feel a connection."

Tracking student engagement progress from their first year to graduation, SBL parallels a student's academic achievements to graduation but for experiences outside the classroom. In addition, SBL awards students for reaching each achievement level by providing FREE SBL keepsakes (i.e., T-shirts, hats, hoodies, cups, graduation cords, and more). We're proud to have our first three 100% challenge completers, Gabrielle, Summer, and Krishna, step outside of their comfort zones, make meaningful connections with their peers, and complete 63 before their degree!

Shawanda Daniel, Program Manager of Assessment and Analysis, Kennesaw State University

Students and division leaders alike gravitate to the program. The Division of Student Affairs first entered its events, along with student organization events, into Anthology Engage. Divisions throughout the institution have since followed and continue to add events to the system to be a part of SBL.

An abundance of organizations offered by a university can be both exciting and overwhelming for a new student. For the more than 43,000 students enrolled at its dual campuses, KSU offers over 400 student organizations and multiple levels of resources. SBL provides an easy and engaging entry point into the university's organizations. "We have eager students— students who want to be involved, who want to find their place on campus, whether it's Marietta Campus or Kennesaw," said Daniel. "To connect to a university with all these options, most students just don't know where to start, and Scrappy's Bucket List is that start."

In the past, university students were residential and had built-in opportunities to connect, including walking to dining or residence halls, visiting a physical library, or meeting in the quad. Today's student experience is different without those natural touch points. "You have two to three cohorts with some COVID experience where they haven't been in a consistent pattern. Scrappy's Bucket List becomes a very easy pull to a first experience, which then can multiply," said Rudy Jackson, Ph.D., director of learning and improvement at Kennesaw State University. "All these elements become points of contact in a world where students are uncertain and unfamiliar. That's one of the things that it helps us do as opposed to us just saying, 'We've got 25 departments and hundreds of activities.'"

In addition to encouraging student engagement, SBL supports the university's efforts to develop a more holistic data set to better evaluate the relationship between student engagement and success. SBL leverages a module within Anthology Engage to progress along a co-curricular path.

"Scrappy's Bucket List operates so seamlessly with Engage … it's almost as if it is Engage," said Jackson. "It allows us to collect data to demonstrate the level of engagement, and it serves as an incentive program that helps build identity and move folks through. It becomes a way that we actually are giving value to the student experience and not just saying, 'Hey, we got all this stuff; why aren't you showing up?' We're actually showing them the value of showing up."

Anthology Engage also enables KSU to use cohort-based comparisons. "KSU has very large nonresidential and online communities, so sometimes when we look at trends, we may begin to disaggregate those in Scrappy's Bucket List to see the trends having a greater impact on our online users, our hybrid users, or our residential users. It allows us to drill down a bit across the student experience," said Jackson.

Using SBL, the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Divisions can go beyond tracking numbers and create customized reports. "If you have a program, you can not only track who was attending, you can begin to triangulate external data to try to make inferences about the impact," said Jackson. "The value of Scrappy's Bucket List is more than a tool to track participation; it's an engagement tool that allows the institution to promote engagement in activities that we've deemed more important. These are fun, low-risk activities, and probably most importantly, they're shareable activities."

Insights Delivered

In the first year of implementation, nearly 60 percent of students had made progress toward completing Scrappy's Bucket List. As of May 2023, a total of 5,958 students have reached the 10% of goal mark. "I'm most proud of the 10% mark because those are probably the students that are trying to go to six events on the list versus someone who just happened to be at an event because their friend is there and they get credit," said Daniel. Three completers have reached 100% in the first two years of SBL's launch.

Epilogue

"SBL is a way to engage and create some connection. It's these fun things that all the students can participate in. You don't have to be in an organization," said Jackson. "It's not a hardcore tradition yet, but that's the value add, where every institution of higher ed is looking for ways to create meaningful connections with their students."

In 2022, KSU announced an initiative developed by the Division of Student Affairs with the support of the Office of the President, called FLIGHT. It is designed to develop a class-year identity program to increase students' sense of belonging and affinity for KSU, KSU spirit, and ultimately their retention and progression at KSU. Incoming students in 2022 belong to FLIGHT26 (indicating their potential graduation year of 2026). KSU is exploring ways to infuse Scrappy's Bucket List into the FLIGHT program.

Products highlighted in this success story:

anthology. **Engage**

anthology
Advancing Knowledge