Preamble

We had a very interesting and intense day of discussions with a wide range of faculty, administrators, and staff, and we thank them all for their time and attention. The four-way sharing between Kansas State University (K State) and the three review team universities (Michigan State, Virginia Tech, and OU) was very productive. We all have ideas to take back and consider for our campuses.

It is clear that K State is a university in transition and with an ambitious upward trajectory, headed by a visionary President and Provost. Graduate programs are a central component of the K State 2025 plan to have K State recognized by 2025 as one of the nation’s Top 50 Public Research Universities. Our task was to review and make observations and recommendations about what the University is and should be doing to enable the graduate programs to do their part in achieving K State 2025. While we had a very intense and productive day, our time on any one topic or with any one group was limited, so we will provide our initial observations, all of which need and deserve greater discussion at K State. So, please accept our comments and recommendations as starting points for your discussion and planning.

Underlying all the discussions is the undercurrent of the fundamental change underway at K State, from being very decentralized with a primarily-undergraduate focus, to a research institution that aspires to be in the top 50 nationally. To meet this goal, K State needs to recruit and retain the best faculty, who will demand to work with the best graduate students, which will require an increased focus and priority on graduate student recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement. Goal III of K State 2025 is to “Advance a culture of excellence that attracts highly talented, diverse graduate students and produces graduates recognized as outstanding in their respective professions”. This cannot be achieved by the Graduate School alone, but will require participation and collaboration of all facets of the University. It will require an increased level of centralized priority setting and resource allocation that will challenge the previous decentralized status quo, even while such a process must and will provide for flexibility of implementation that reflects and respects the disciplinary differences between and within colleges. However, this flexibility must be based on a broadly accepted and adopted sense of priorities, actions, and norms. The Graduate School can coordinate and lead the
efforts related to graduate education, but it must be done in partnership with the stakeholders and in coordination with the larger research agenda.

**Recommendations**

**Staffing**

1. **Dean Shanklin should review all of the existing staff and their responsibilities to ensure the most effective organization.** A primary goal should be to delegate oversight of routine Graduate School operations so the Dean can focus on developing and implementing the strategic vision and plans for the graduate programs. This might be accomplished by creating (through reassignment of existing positions and personnel and/or new hires) the roles of chief staff, office manager, operations manager, and admissions/advisor supervisor. A useful management tool for the (re)organization is to conduct a critical review of current processes to develop a 'not-to-do' list to ensure that the staff are engaged in the most important, high priority activities.

2. **The Associate Dean position is critical to support the Dean, but we recommend that this should be implemented as two 0.5FTE positions filled from existing tenured K State faculty, on 3 year renewable term appointments.** The reviewer's Graduate Schools operate this way—advantages being additional disciplinary contextual expertise and connections, as well as a broader base of individuals to help lead the 2025 discussions. These Associate Deans should be tasked under guidance of the Dean to develop and implement the academic strategies and initiatives for the graduate programs. Having the AD’s come from the faculty will enhance the effectiveness of their Grad School initiatives as they will already understand the campus culture and how it needs to and can change. This strategy often provides a career development track for future administrative leaders.

3. **Consider restructuring the admissions and advising staff from a task-focus to a department focus,** so that each staff member is assigned a subset of departments and programs for which they provide all Graduate School functions - admissions and advising/clearance support for all students, masters and doctoral. This provides implicit cross-training and will set the stage for them to ‘partner’ with their client departments to tailor and implement existing and new policies and procedures to the needs of the departments(s).

4. **Consider increasing the GRA pool as needed to assist the Dean and AD’s with events and special projects especially related to Graduate Student Life.**

**Linkages**
The Graduate School can be the focus and coordinator for campus discussions and plans to meet the graduate program needs for 2025, but beyond the President, Provost and Graduate Dean, the current level of engagement of the stakeholders is not clear. Graduate education, particularly doctoral education, is inextricably linked to research. The research agenda should be established and then tightly coupled to the graduate education initiatives.

The primary stakeholders with a vested interest in the graduate enterprise are the President and Provost, Graduate School, Graduate Council, Deans Council, VPR, Office of Research, College Associate Deans for Research and Graduate Studies, K-State Olathe (and others??). In coordination with the Provost, The Graduate Dean should reach out and engage each of these individually and together, to help formulate a communication and collaboration plan so the whole enterprise has the same shared vision and commitment as to how the graduate enterprise will meet the needs of K State 2025. The exact form of the linkages will come from the discussions, but we make some initial observations and suggestions below.

5. **There should be a dotted reporting line from the Graduate Dean to the VPR** to formalize the natural symbiosis between the graduate programs and the research mission. The Graduate Dean should participate in the VPR staff and strategic planning discussions, to inform them of national trends and priorities (eg from CGS) and to advocate for graduate education and its importance to the research mission. Likewise, the Graduate Dean will take back useful information about the research trends that will inform the Graduate Council and broader graduate education enterprise at K State.

The academic Deans will play a critical role but we did not see a consensus or a commitment for joint planning. While there will be implementation differences between colleges and departments, and even within departments, there does need to be a consensus commitment to priorities and expectations. College-specific issues will remain the domain of the colleges, but there are issues that are common across all colleges and would be good starting points to grow a community agreement and consistent practices across campus.

6. **K State needs an evolving institutional plan for graduate education**, developed by the Graduate School with participation from the stakeholders, that provides a rolling three year vision of new programs and initiatives. This can inform the broader campus and provide early alerts so there are no “surprises”. 😊

**Common Priority Issues**
Tuition waivers (or remission) for graduate research assistants were raised by most of the groups we met, yet with widely different views as to how big a problem, and even less consensus on possible solutions.

7. If the current plan of requiring grants or the PI’s department to find the funds, which is the accepted practice at most comprehensive research universities, is to continue it should be an explicit expectation with a consistent set of practices in place across the University.

This is an area where a centralized solution needs to be developed and implemented. Several solutions were suggested, but we sensed the pushback was as much to do with resistance to any centralized or coordinated solution per se as it was to the specific solutions.

8. A consistent and sustainable graduate research assistant tuition remission policy could be the first task for a campus graduate programs planning task force that includes the Graduate Dean and VPR.

Graduate assistant stipends were also raised frequently, in particular that they are too low, but again there were no solutions offered. There are good examples at peer institutions for how to establish stipend guidelines and structure that reflect variations between disciplines, and strategies to grow stipends through targeted rather than across-the-board programs.

At a minimum, guidelines should be developed for minimum stipends at each level of appointment with annual increases built in. This is an appropriate task for the University Graduate Council.

9. Institutional guidelines for GA stipends and plans to address uncompetitive stipends in priority areas should be developed. This would be another excellent early topic for a campus graduate programs planning task force that includes the stakeholders (colleges, departments, PI’s, VPR, Grad School, UGC).

There was an interesting (and familiar) discussion with the deans about support for post-docs and graduate assistants, and the apparent contradictory pressures on faculty to maximize research outcomes (for which they may give preference to post docs as they are already experienced and productive) and the graduate mission in support of K State 2025 (in which case they would give preference to GRA’s to improve graduate enrolment and degree statistics). This is a good topic for community discussion to generate guidelines and expectations.
This is an important function but cannot be done by the Dean alone as she needs to focus on being the lead for broader graduate program initiatives. Also, given the historic lesser attention to graduate fundraising, the engagement of the Provost and President is needed to affirm its importance to the donor community. A base of friend-raising and alumni relations is a necessary precursor to specific asks to support the 2025 graduate priorities.

**Space and Place**

Graduate programs historically are decentralized and delegated to the academic departments following the scholarly apprenticeship model of graduate education. However, this has resulted in little centralized attention and priority, plus the students can feel isolated and vulnerable. As K State moves towards K State 2025, it needs centralized recognition, priority, and planning to grow the graduate programs in size and status. The President and the Provost must publically talk about graduate education in balance with their discussions about undergraduate education. This cannot happen effectively if there is not a visible campus graduate education identity. Hence the need for a Graduate Space and Sense of Place, which must be the underpinning of the graduate programs strategy.

There is no campus space identified as graduate student space other than the very cramped Graduate School space in Fairchild Hall. Even the Graduate Student Congress has no space in the Student Union but camps out in one small room carved out of Fairchild Hall. This sends a strong message to the campus that graduate programs are not a priority, and stifles initiative. It also reinforces some faculty's attitude that graduate students should live their entire existence in the lab and not engage with the larger community, which does not prepare them well for the collaborative multifaceted work environment they will face after graduation. All three of the review team’s campuses have dedicated space not only adequate for the administrative functions of the graduate colleges, but also to support their graduate student life programs.

10. **Recommendations** - Identify and provide a dedicated space (in Calvin Hall?) that collocates the Graduate School and Graduate Student Council with space for Graduate Student Life. This will be a beacon and catalyst for the graduate dimension of K State.

The collaboration of the Graduate School and Graduate Student Congress is exemplary and should be supported and expanded in the new space. They already have innovative and creative programs, ranging from the Calling Campaign last summer where they contacted all admitted prospective graduate students, to the four professional development programs and the research forum they organize each semester. They are serving both the immediate needs of the graduate students and creating an identity and visibility for the graduate programs on campus.
The professional development initiatives by the Graduate School and GSC are commendable and we would recommend and expect them to grow and flourish in the new dedicated Graduate Student Life space. The Presidential support that grew the GSC graduate travel awards by $100K was a nice recognition and affirmation of the graduate mission.

We recommend ways to support growth of the number of core ‘active’ GSC members from the current 10-15, in anticipation of future growth in GS/GSC initiatives.

**Other**

Graduate retention, completion, time-to-degree and placement data are important, nationally recognized benchmarks to help program evaluation, planning, and improvement by departments and colleges. The Graduate School can play a central role in developing these metrics which should be part of a broader graduate analytics effort, similar but distinct from existing undergraduate tracking and metrics.

There is a steady increase in interdisciplinary research and graduate degrees, but they often are impeded by disciplinary barriers and siloes on campus. The Graduate School should engage the colleges and VPR in identifying incentives and obstacles to interdisciplinary research and programs, and recommend strategies to enable and support interdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary programs and efforts may be particularly vulnerable in an environment of responsibility-centered budgeting. These programs need to be purposefully nurtured across collegiate lines, and the recommendations of the recent interdisciplinary task force need to be reviewed and acted upon.

The K-State Leavenworth programs are robust and clearly integral to the strategic thinking and priorities of the main campus graduate programs. They serve as a good example and showcase of focused graduate programs that deliver a quality graduate experience to a qualified and deserving student demographic. The K-State Olathe campus has a similar opportunity to showcase industry and career-focused research and graduate programs.

The current review and approval process for graduate courses and programs is unusual and not found in any other institution we know. Proposals and plans for graduate courses and programs originate in the academic unit (department or program), and pass through the academic college for approval before being sent to the Graduate Council. The Graduate Council has members of the graduate faculty from all academic colleges, and is charged with providing a university-wide review and approval of graduate programs in order to maintain consistency of standards and practice. This is consistent with other research universities. However, unlike
other research universities, at K State the proposals then go to the Faculty Senate, which appears duplicative of the Graduate Council and therefore redundant and inefficient. Further, and more significantly, most graduate charters place authority and responsibility for graduate programs with the graduate faculty. The Faculty Senate is not exclusively comprised of graduate faculty, so having Faculty Senate review graduate course and program proposals would appear to contradict the primacy of graduate faculty on graduate issues.

12. **We recommend removing the Faculty Senate from the review and approval process for graduate courses and programs.** Given the appropriate need for a university-wide review of academic program proposals once they have left the academic college, the Faculty Senate may fill this role for undergraduate program proposals.