

# **2010 KUCIMAT Alumni Survey Results**



**Prepared For:  
KUCIMAT Alumni Board**

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## **Executive Summary**

At the Spring 2010 Board Meeting, KUCIMAT Board Members discussed with Department Chair Marilu Goodyear and Academic Advisor/External Affairs Director Ray Hummert plans for a survey of KU MPA alumni. In conjunction with Dr. Nalbandian's work to engage the alumni to "determine what it is that they consider "precious" about the past and their connection with KU and the department," the survey would assist the KUCIMAT board in gauging the participation level of alumni and the areas of interest for future interaction and communication. The timing also allowed for questions relevant to the proposed transition from department to school designation, and the potential name of the school.

The survey was developed in June by Dr. Nalbandian, Past President Mark Watson, and Board Member Liz Habkirk. It consisted of nine sections with a total of 30 questions. Alumni were invited to participate in the survey distributed on July 26<sup>th</sup> via direct email from Ray Hummert, in the Greener Grass newsletter, and the LinkedIn website. The survey closed on August 23, 2010. There were 215 total responses.

### **Result Highlights (full Results are located in Appendix A):**

*Statistical Information Section: Responses were higher in number for the last several years of graduates, however the survey generated a wide range of interest from all classes back to 1961. The majority of respondents work at the local government level. With 60% of respondents being dues paid members of KUCIMAT, the Board may want to focus on communicating the benefits received and the importance of this way of formal engagement.*

- Respondents' graduation years ranged from 1961 to 2011. The class of 2007 had the most responses with 14.
- Almost 60% of respondents are employed full time with a local government. Another 10% are employed with another level of government.
- Almost 60% of respondents are dues paid members of KUCIMAT.
- 65% of respondents were male; 35% if the respondents were female.

*Relationship of the MPA Program to Employment: In this section we see extremely positive results on how the KU MPA program meets the needs in the practice of local government management. Perhaps due to the economic climate, most alumni responded with a need for more focus on complex budget and public finance.*

- 93% of respondents strongly agree or agree that the coursework completed during their MPA prepared them well for their employment.
- 98% of respondents strongly agree or agree that the knowledge and skills developed at KU are related to their employment.
- When asked what area they would like to see more coursework focus on, alumni provided a variety of answers. Most frequently they mentioned: budget/public finance, economic development, council manager relations, and infrastructure management (planning, engineering, and public works).

*Department Experience: In this section, we see the important experiences that alumni want to maintain, with particular emphasis on local government and practical training. This will be*

*echoed in other questions throughout the survey. We also see comments that push for a more connected faculty to the alumni and the KUCIMAT program.*

- When asked what one word or sentence they use to describe the program to others alumni most frequently responded with a focus on local government education, preparation of city managers, practical training, a strong alumni network, and excellence.
- When asked what three experiences they would repeat from their time at KU, alumni most frequently responded with specific classes/projects/professors, attendance at the ICMA conferences, the internship experience, camaraderie with their classmates and the opportunities for connection with alumni.
- When asked what they would want to preserve as "precious" about the KU MPA program as the department moves into the future, and what would be worth preserving as a guide to the future they answered with items like preserving the department's focus on local government, preserving the internship option, offering small class sizes, maintaining the connection with the alumni, and maintaining the high caliber faculty and coursework.
- When asked what could be improved about the program, alumni answered ensuring an excellent faculty grounded in the practice of public administration, stronger ties between the alumni and faculty, early career support, and a practical focus on the local government management.
- Over 73% of respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement that they rely on former classmates and other alumni for advice and information.

*Connection to the Department: The levels of engagement with the Department are extremely high among alumni, with a focus on support of the students. However alumni noted a disconnect with the faculty and Department. This was especially true if the alumni were not located in the Kansas City area or in the State of Kansas. Also in this section, once again respondents are voicing concerns about losing the focus on public administration.*

- Although 69% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to the Department, many of the comments attached discussed a regional disconnect if the alumni was not in Kansas or the Kansas City area.
- Almost 68% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they were concerned about the future of the department. In the comments, most noted the proposed school/name change and the potential to lose focus on public administration.
- 69% of alumni agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication from the Department.
- When asked how they have given to the Department over the last three years, the most frequent answers were paid KUCIMAT dues (72%), spoken to a potential student on behalf of the program (46%) and provided general financial support for the MPA Program (33%). Only 14% of respondents answered that they had not given in any way to the Department over the last three years.
- Alumni showed a preference for receiving more information on faculty research, studies and work and for alumni updates such as success stories, marriages, births, promotions, etc.
- When asked how the Department can better utilize alumni, the most frequent answers were related to recruitment of new students, offering mentoring opportunities for students and recent graduates, setting up regional alumni events, and assisting in curriculum discussions and research.

*Department Values: Alumni seem satisfied with the ways in which the Department recognizes accomplishments and represents itself.*

- 73% of alumni agree or strongly agree that the Department recognizes the accomplishments of alumni and academics.
- 81% of alumni agree or strongly agree that the Department represents itself well to alumni.
- 89% of alumni strongly agree or agree that the Department represents itself well to the city/county management profession nationally.

*Department Services to Alumni: The Department may benefit by offering ways in which alumni can interact with Faculty either through surveys, seminars or through online-training classes.*

- Many alumni (43%) have never been asked to assist faculty with research through surveys or data development. Another 28% noted that they had rarely been asked.
- A majority of alumni (65%) would be strongly interested or interested in on-line training courses developed by KU faculty.
- A slightly smaller number (63%) would be strongly interested or interested in attending a “return to campus” specialty seminar.
- Generally, alumni were not interested in the use of KU faculty for advisory services and local problem assessments on a fee for services basis.

*Department Fund Raising: From this section, the Department could conclude that more information about fundraising (i.e. what the money is used for, how it benefits the program, etc) could be beneficial. Also of note, items specifically concerning the support of students rose to the top of the priority list when alumni were asked about fundraising efforts.*

- 36% of alumni identify themselves as annual financial givers to the KU MPA program. Another 24% say they occasionally provide financial contributions.
- The majority of alumni (69%) have not contributed to a specific scholarship or endowment at KU within the last three years.
- When asked if they are familiar with all the various programs where funds are raised within the Department, most said “no” (41%) and 39% said “somewhat.”
- When asked which fundraising efforts were most important to them, alumni named scholarships for students as the most important, followed by support for prospective students/campus visits. The remainder of the options all ranked similarly between 2.65 and 2.9 out of five.

*Department Name Change: Alumni are extremely concerned about the potential name change. The large number of comments and overwhelming support for maintaining Public Administration as the new name are significant. Here, most comments voiced concerns about losing focus on the core elements of the program and the potential for diminishing the program’s standing in the public administration community.*

- When asked about their preference for the name of a new school, less than 5% of alumni supported the name change to “School of Public Affairs.”
- Over 67% preferred the name “School of Public Administration” while 28% preferred the name “School of Public Administration and Affairs.”

- In the “Other” options, alumni tended to include “Public Management” as the preferred option.
- 71% of alumni felt very strongly or strongly about their choice of name for the school.
- Alumni submitted a large number of comments on the name change. Most of them focus on the need to keep “Administration” in the name and maintain that “Public Affairs” is simply too broad.

#### *Additional Comments*

- Many comments were positive in terms of having a survey to provide feedback to the KUCIMATs and the faculty

#### **Conclusion:**

The KUCIMAT Board should be pleased with the high level of interest among the alumni. With over 200 surveys returned, the results are a meaningful representation of the concerns and positions of the KU MPA alumni.

From the results we see a number of themes developing. Most importantly, there is real concern that the program is losing its focus on local government. Likely, this is being driven by apprehension on the potential name change, and in many of the comments there is a sense that this could result in a diminishing of the value of the MPA degree out “in the field.” Respondents found ways to bring this concern up in nearly every section of the survey which should relay its importance.

Another theme that should be noted, and tracked in the future, is the high level of alumni engagement. In the question on the ways in which they participated in the Department, only 14% of alumni responded that they did not participate. It would be interesting in the future to compare these rates against other KU Departments or other Public Administration Departments nationwide. Additionally, alumni were also not restrictive in their giving to financial contributions. While financial giving is important, it may not capture the concern and engagement of the alumni as the other ways of participation, such as speaking to potential students, offering part- and full-time internships and participating in the KUCIMAT association do.

This leads to the next theme. While there is a high level of engagement, or desire for engagement on the part of alumni, there does appear to be a disconnect, either real or perceived, between the faculty and the alumni. Several of the questions spoke to a desire for more information on what the faculty are working on, more opportunities to engage with the faculty on field research or curriculum discussions, and more opportunities for regional activities. The high level of concern alumni showed for student success is directly correlated to their desire for a high caliber faculty grounded in local government administration.

Finally, from the responses we should note that the alumni are extremely supportive of the students. They prioritized fundraising on efforts that are focused on students. They commented on the desire for more opportunities for mentoring and engagement with the students, and they showed interest in the coursework and curriculum being completed on-campus.

## **Next Steps**

During their August 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, the KUCIMAT Board directed the outgoing president, incoming president, and president-elect to pursue a new Board structure that would formalize the areas of responsibility among those three positions. In general, the group discussed the following breakdown:

**Past-President** -- On-campus full-time student linkages. Communication (listening about help that's needed, finding out about positives and opportunities of the on-campus experience; writing materials from that listening to the newsletter, LinkedIn, etc.). Resource development (setting expectation to start returning to the KUCIMATS, beginning with membership and even the starter \$20 contribution).

**President** -- Faculty Linkages. Communication (finding out and sharing about research that's going on campus, welcome and help connect any new faculty. Establish a program to link individual faculty with alumni. Write and share that to the newsletter, LinkedIn, etc.)

**President-elect** -- Alumni memberships and linkages. Communication (gathering up information between alumni for accomplishments and getting that around). Focus upon resource development (getting universal KUCIMAT dues paying membership, developing fundraising and explaining where those resources are going, promoting KUCIMAT alumni to develop job/research/learning opportunities for each other and the students).

These positions would lead these efforts, supported by the remainder of the Board, to help address some of the prevalent issues displayed in the survey results.