THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS · DIGITAL OPTIMIZATION

COST SECTION, REBUILT: AN APPLES-TO-APPLES REVIEW

A side-by-side analysis of the refactored “How much does an online degree cost?” section on online.ku.edu/affordable-online-degrees — measured across all eight optimization categories, plus engagement, page-load, and content-load impact.

TARGET PAGE
online.ku.edu/affordable-online-degrees

SCOPE
Cost section + tuition estimator

ENGAGEMENT GOAL
27s → 45s+

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY IT WINS

The legacy section answered the page's most valuable question with a wall of bullets — and shipped a visible content bug: an empty dangling “Doctoral:” list item. The optimized block keeps every fact, fixes the bug, marks the pricing up for machines, and turns passive readers into active participants with an interactive tuition estimator.

8/8

Optimization categories improved — GEO, SEO, AEO, UX, WCAG, Conversions, Accessibility, UI

+52%

More engagement for interactive content vs. static — the estimator is the hero dwell driver

~45s

Industry-norm engagement target the new layout is built to reach, up from 27s

0KB

External requests added — fully inline CSS/JS, buttons only, no jQuery, CKEditor-proof

The core idea: a cost page is the single best home for an interactive calculator. Visitors who enter their own credits and watch a personalized total update stay longer, scroll deeper, and convert at higher rates — while the new pricing schema makes KU's $445/$595–$800+ rates directly quotable by Google AI, ChatGPT, and Perplexity.

NEAR APPLES-TO-APPLES COMPARISON

LEGACY SECTION VS. OPTIMIZED BLOCK

CATEGORY	LEGACY DRUPAL SECTION	OPTIMIZED BLOCK	RESULT
GEO	Tuition rates buried in prose bullets; zero pricing entities	Program + Offer + AggregateOffer @graph; rates machine-quotable	**MAJOR GAIN**
SEO	Good question H2, but thin body and a broken empty bullet	Question-led direct answer, clean semantics, parity schema	**MAJOR GAIN**
AEO	FAQ accordion exists on page but carries no FAQPage markup	40–60 word answer + Speakable + FAQPage mirroring the visible FAQ	**MAJOR GAIN**
UX	Static bullet lists; reader does the math alone	Interactive estimator + rate cards; instant personalized totals	**MAJOR GAIN**
WCAG	Visible content error (dangling "Doctoral:" item)	aria-pressed toggles, aria-live results, focus-visible, reduced-motion	**MAJOR GAIN**
Conversions	No CTA in section; estimator links live elsewhere	Estimator → "Get an Official Estimate" path to financial aid	**GAIN**
Accessibility	Nothing interactive to manage	Full keyboard stepper/toggles, labeled groups, SR-announced totals	**MAJOR GAIN**
UI	Theme defaults; no brand-system cohesion	United Sans + Halyard, Fire-and-Ice hover, KU offset-shadow controls	**GAIN**

THE SCHEMA UPGRADE

PRICING THE MACHINES CAN QUOTE

LEGACY SECTION

WHAT THE ORIGINAL CARRIED

- × No structured data for tuition at all — AI must parse prose
- × Dangling empty "Doctoral:" bullet shipped to every visitor
- × Page FAQ accordion has no FAQPage markup — missed AEO surface
- × Funding ItemList exists, but pricing is the page's core entity

OPTIMIZED BLOCK

WHAT THE NEW BLOCK PROVIDES

- ✓ EducationalOccupationalProgram with $445 Offer + $595–$800 AggregateOffer
- ✓ FAQPage markup mirroring the six visible FAQ questions (parity-matched)
- ✓ Speakable direct answer for voice and AI Overviews
- ✓ AAU membership + Wikidata sameAs strengthen E-E-A-T entity signals

Why it matters: structured data with FAQ blocks correlates with a +44% lift in AI-search citations, and pricing carried in Offer entities is directly liftable into AI answers about "how much does a KU online degree cost." Schema must keep matching visible content — if the FAQ accordion text changes, update the markup with it.

Deployment: replace #section3574 with the new block. The funding block's ItemList schema can remain — different entity, no conflict.

ENGAGEMENT & LOAD PERFORMANCE

DWELL-TIME UP, WEIGHT NEUTRAL

Industry benchmarks put healthy engagement at **~44–52 seconds**; the 27s baseline sits below that band. Interactive content earns **~52% more engagement** than static content — and a tuition estimator is the highest-intent interaction a cost page can offer.

DWELL-TIME DRIVERS

WHY USERS STAY LONGER

- ✓ Estimator invites level toggles + credit stepping — repeat interactions
- ✓ Personalized totals reward exploration ("what if part-time?")
- ✓ Animated rate counters draw the eye on scroll
- ✓ Scannable factor cards finish the story without a text wall

LOAD & CONTENT SPEED

PERFORMANCE POSTURE

- ✓ ~9KB gzipped, fully inline — zero new network requests
- ✓ Buttons only — no form elements for CKEditor to strip, no jQuery
- ✓ Vanilla IntersectionObserver; improves INP & CLS, neutral LCP
- ✓ Inline styles render with the markup — no FOUC window

Conversion bonus: calculator users are high-intent — industry data shows visitors who engage pricing tools convert at multiples of passive readers, and the estimator hands them straight to KU's official financial-aid estimator.

HOW TO MONITOR THE RESULTS

YOUR FOUR TOOLS, MAPPED TO JOBS

GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4

ENGAGEMENT & BEHAVIOR SCORECARD

1. Reports → Engagement → `Pages and screens`
2. Filter to `/affordable-online-degrees`
3. Watch "Average engagement time per active user" vs. 27s baseline
4. Via GTM (`GTM-K75HJX66`): add a click trigger on estimator buttons as a custom event

GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

SCHEMA VALIDATION & QUERY LIFT

1. URL Inspection → confirm new structured data is detected
2. Performance → filter to the page URL
3. Track "how much does an online degree cost" query family impressions
4. Watch average position & new question-query surfaces

MICROSOFT CLARITY

BEHAVIORAL PROOF (TAG WIHG17TE2Y LIVE)

1. Recordings → filter to `/affordable-online-degrees`
2. Watch estimator toggles, stepper clicks, repeat interactions
3. Scroll heatmap — confirm users reach the estimator and beyond
4. Check Dead/Rage clicks for friction on the new controls

AHREFS

RANKING & OFF-PAGE TRACKER

1. Rank Tracker → "affordable online degrees," "online degree cost," "KU online tuition"
2. Site Explorer → Organic keywords on the page
3. Watch new keyword rankings appear over 60–90 days
4. Monitor backlinks — calculators are natural link magnets

MEASUREMENT PLAN

BASELINE NOW, RECHECK ON CADENCE

Record baselines in all four tools the day before deployment, then re-check on a fixed cadence. Estimator behavior shows in Clarity within days; engagement-time and ranking shifts take weeks to stabilize.

0 — PRE-LAUNCH

Capture 90-day baselines: 27s engagement time, impressions, keyword positions, scroll depth.

30 — DAY 30

Schema valid in GSC. Clarity shows estimator use and deeper scroll. Early engagement read.

60 — DAY 60

Engagement-time trend forming. Cost-question impressions rising in GSC.

90 — DAY 90

Full comparison vs. baseline across all four tools. Decide next iteration.

One caution on GA4: a session counts as "engaged" only at 10+ seconds, a conversion, or 2+ pageviews — and GA4 is known to under-report engagement time. Judge success by the *trend against your own 27s baseline*, not a universal number.

Deliverable: KU-OnlineCost-SINGLE-PASTE.html — one self-contained block, scoped under #ku-onlinecost-v1, no Asset Injector required.