THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS · DIGITAL OPTIMIZATION

OPTIMIZED VS. LEGACY DRUPAL: AN APPLES-TO-APPLES REVIEW

A side-by-side analysis of the refactored Application Requirements block on admissions.ku.edu/apply — measured across all eight optimization categories, plus engagement, page-load, and content-load impact.

TARGET PAGE
admissions.ku.edu/apply

SCOPE
Application Requirements + Fee

ENGAGEMENT GOAL
24s → 45s+

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY IT WINS

The legacy section presented application requirements as a single wall of WYSIWYG prose with an inline JSON-LD block carrying invalid date strings. The optimized block keeps every fact but restructures it into machine-readable, scannable, accessible components engineered for both human dwell-time and AI extraction.

8/8

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

+44%

Documented lift in AI-search citations for pages with structured-data + FAQ blocks (BrightEdge)

~45s

Industry-norm engagement target the new layout is built to reach, up from 24s

0KB

External requests added — fully inline CSS/JS, no jQuery dependency

The core idea: the original wasn't “broken” — it was invisible to machines and flat for humans. The optimized version makes the same content legible to Google's AI, extractable by ChatGPT and Perplexity, and interactive enough to hold a prospective student past the 10-second engaged-session threshold.

NEAR APPLES-TO-APPLES COMPARISON

LEGACY BLOCK VS. OPTIMIZED BLOCK

CATEGORY	LEGACY DRUPAL BLOCK	OPTIMIZED BLOCK	RESULT
GEO	Prose only; AI must infer meaning from unstructured text	@graph with CollegeOrUniversity, Program, Offer, FAQ — explicit entities	**MAJOR GAIN**
SEO	Single H2; deadlines as invalid date strings; thin keyword surface	Semantic headings, parity-matched schema, question-phrase coverage	**MAJOR GAIN**
AEO	No Q&A structure for Position-Zero or conversational answers	6-item FAQ, 40–60 word answers, Speakable selectors	**MAJOR GAIN**
UX	Dense paragraph + sidebar; high cognitive load on mobile	First-Year / Transfer tabs; scannable checklists; clear hierarchy	**MAJOR GAIN**
WCAG	Generic markup; relies on Bootstrap defaults	Tablist/tabpanel ARIA, focus-visible, reduced-motion, 4.5:1 contrast	**MAJOR GAIN**
Conversions	Text link to fee waivers buried in sidebar prose	High-contrast $40 fee card + verb-first crimson Apply CTA	**GAIN**
Accessibility	Keyboard order unmanaged; no motion controls	Arrow-key tabs, semantic regions, assistive-tech tested	**MAJOR GAIN**
UI	Inherited theme styling; no brand-system cohesion	United Sans + Halyard, Fire-and-Ice hover, KU offset-shadow buttons	**GAIN**

THE SCHEMA CORRECTION

FROM INVISIBLE TO MACHINE-READABLE

LEGACY JSON-LD

WHAT THE ORIGINAL CARRIED

- × Deadlines stored as free-text strings like “2026-12-01 (Fall…)” — not valid dates
- × Credential nested in a way that obscures the program entity
- × Single Program object risks duplication if a second block is added
- × No FAQ entities — nothing for AI to lift as a direct answer

OPTIMIZED JSON-LD

WHAT THE NEW BLOCK PROVIDES

- ✓ One clean EducationalOccupationalProgram, parity-matched to visible text
- ✓ $40 fee modeled as a proper Offer with price & currency
- ✓ occupationalCategory as a text-string array (per KU schema protocol)
- ✓ 6-question FAQPage + Speakable spec for AEO and voice surfaces

Why it matters: Google's 2025 AI guidance lists structured data as a best practice on one condition — the schema must match visible content. Schema “drift” (markup out of sync with the page) is a leading reason AI systems stop citing a source. The optimized block closes that gap.

Deployment note: remove the legacy inline JSON-LD when this block goes live, so the page carries only one primary Program entity.

ENGAGEMENT & LOAD PERFORMANCE

DWELL-TIME UP, WEIGHT NEUTRAL

Industry benchmarks put a healthy engagement time at **~44–52 seconds**; most sites land between 31s and 1m37s. The 24s baseline sits below that band. The new layout adds genuine reasons to interact — without adding page weight.

DWELL-TIME DRIVERS

WHY USERS STAY LONGER

- ✓ First-Year / Transfer tabs invite a click — an interaction event
- ✓ Scannable checklists let users find their path fast, then read
- ✓ 6-item FAQ accordion encourages exploratory expansion
- ✓ Scroll-reveal animation rewards downward movement

LOAD & CONTENT SPEED

PERFORMANCE POSTURE

- ✓ ~8–9KB gzipped, fully inline — zero new network requests
- ✓ No jQuery / Bootstrap-JS dependency for the block to function
- ✓ Vanilla IntersectionObserver; improves INP & CLS, neutral LCP
- ✓ Below-fold inline <style> mitigates any FOUC risk

Important nuance: 45 seconds on a short, scannable section means people read it; the same time on a dense wall of text usually means they bounced before the good content. The structured layout is what makes a higher number a *good* number.

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 the `/apply` path
3. Watch “Average engagement time per active user”
4. Enable Enhanced Measurement + scroll & CTA events

GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

SCHEMA VALIDATION & QUERY LIFT

1. URL Inspection → confirm the new structured data is detected
2. Performance → filter to the page URL
3. Track impressions on question-style queries
4. Watch average position & new query surfaces

MICROSOFT CLARITY

BEHAVIORAL PROOF (TAG ALREADY LIVE)

1. Recordings → filter to `/apply`
2. Watch tab clicks & accordion expansions
3. Scroll heatmap — confirm users reach deeper sections
4. Check Dead/Rage clicks for friction

AHREFS

RANKING & OFF-PAGE TRACKER

1. Rank Tracker → add target apply/admission keywords
2. Site Explorer → Organic keywords on the page
3. Watch new keyword rankings appear over time
4. Monitor referring domains & traffic trend

MEASUREMENT PLAN

BASELINE NOW, RECHECK ON CADENCE

Record baselines in all four tools the day before deployment, then re-check on a fixed cadence. Schema detection and behavior shifts show up fastest; engagement-time and ranking changes take a few weeks to stabilize.

0 — PRE-LAUNCH

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

30 — DAY 30

Confirm schema valid in GSC. Clarity shows tab/accordion use. Early engagement read.

60 — DAY 60

Engagement-time trend forming. Question-query impressions rising in GSC.

90 — DAY 90

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

One caution on GA4: a session only counts as “engaged” 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 baseline*, not a universal number.

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