

Heart of a Tiger: Family ties to FHSU run deep in rural Kansas

8/18/23 local

By Tisa Mason

Leading the student government this year is a remarkable student with deep family roots at Fort Hays State University – Ella Burrows. Ella hails from Satanta, a quaint town in Southwest Kansas with a population of 1,000.

Ella is a fourth-generation Tiger, with her great Aunt Mabel Lacey being an esteemed faculty member at FHSU in the 1920s. Her Grandfather, Bob Meier, also taught at FHSU for more than four decades, and her parents and grandparents graduated from FHSU. Ella's family has a long-standing connection with FHSU, with her grandparents and parents meeting at the university. It's a special place for Ella and her family.

The students on our campus hail from diverse backgrounds, each with unique stories, hopes, and dreams. From the very first day, our faculty and staff invest in each student, taking the time to make individual connections, instill confidence, and nurture them toward success. For Ella, that person is a political science faculty member, Wendy Rohleder-Sook.

"Professor Rohleder-Sook and I share similar backgrounds. She has been an exemplary role model for me at FHSU," Ella said. "Thanks to FHSU's small class sizes, I have enjoyed getting to know Professor Rohleder-Sook and several other faculty members with whom I share a close bond."

When asked why she chose Fort Hays State, Ella speaks of her family tradition and the university's affordability. She felt at home when she stepped on campus and knew this was where she wanted to be. She was also impressed by the incredible scholarships provided by the university, allowing her to graduate debt-free before taking on law school loans.

Ella dreams of a future where she can do educational policy work as a university general counsel or lobbyist. She is beginning her junior year as a political science major. She has also included certificates in legal studies and community development as elements in her academic experience. Ella's studies in community development have been helpful as she leads the Student Government Association, empowering FHSU students to use their voices and be active and engaged members of their community.

Ella's SGA presidential goals for 23-24 center on empowering students under a theme of sustainability and campus projects like recycling and The Green Event. The latter is an event that is organized in an environmentally friendly manner, taking into consideration the impact on the environment and minimizing waste. She also plans to make programming on campus more accessible and student-centered by reaching out to diverse groups, addressing student concerns, and engaging the entire community.

"I ran for SGA President to empower FHSU students to use their voices and be active and engaged community members," Ella said. "I am incredibly passionate about FHSU and higher education. I saw this role as an opportunity to give back to the university that means so much to me and my family!"

Reflecting on the past year, Ella expresses that a moment of pride was ensuring there would be no increase to student fees for the current academic year.

“As a strong advocate for affordability, it was a moment of immense pride to navigate the fee process and present the proposal to the Fiscal Affairs Committee of the Kansas Board of Regents.”

In addition, she had the privilege to join the Fort Hays State University Government Relations team in Washington, DC, where our delegation had the opportunity to meet with legislators and share the remarkable impact of our beloved university.

Ella is very engaged on campus. She is a member of the Delta Zeta Sorority, the Honors College, VIP Ambassadors, Young Democrats, and Pi Sigma Alpha. Pi Sigma Alpha is a national political science honor society that recognizes outstanding academic achievement in political science.

This past spring, Ella was selected as a Newman Fellow. This program recognizes and supports community-committed students who are changemakers and public problem-solvers at Campus Compact member institutions. The fellowship provides training and resources that nurture students’ talents and passions to help them develop strategies to achieve social change.

To become a Newman Civic Fellow, a student must be nominated by their college or university president or chancellor. The nomination process typically occurs in the fall, and selected fellows are announced in the spring. The fellowship is open to students from Campus Compact member institutions committed to civic engagement, social justice, and solving community problems. Key areas of Ella’s focus as SGA President and a Newman Fellow include developing voter registration drives, student voting initiatives, and civic engagement surveys.

Ella will travel to Boston for a Campus Compact conference in October. She plans to bring back civic engagement opportunities and ideas for Tiger Nation.

I have enjoyed getting to know Ella this past year. She brings a lot of Tiger pride, compassion, and energy to this vital leadership role. I look forward to an outstanding year as Ella and I work alongside our faculty, staff, and students to create memories, prepare students for their futures, and improve their lives.

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