

Heart of a Tiger: Scholarship program shapes our leaders of tomorrow

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. – The more you learn about the Schmidt Foundation Scholars program at Fort Hays State University and the remarkable young individuals it supports, the more inspired you become. The program is distinctive in the way it highlights the importance of not just academic success but also service to the community. The stories of resilience and determination exhibited by these students are awe-inspiring.

The Schmidt Foundation Scholars program is not just about financial assistance. It also emphasizes mentoring, networking, and building relationships. This holistic approach recognizes the importance of a supportive community. It provides opportunities for these scholars to thrive, both academically and personally. Their experiences will undoubtedly shape them into future leaders who will contribute positively to the university, their community, and the state of Kansas.

These young people's stories are incredible. Applications reveal some students who don't have parents in their daily lives, and those who are being raised by other families. It is very challenging to be successful in high school when you don't have family support. It takes an exceptional young person to take on responsibilities like working to support their younger siblings when there is no other option.

"To have that kind of fortitude just to get through high school is extraordinary – and these students do so while achieving a high grade point average," shared Gary Shorman, president of the Schmidt Foundation. "They are very smart. They're articulate. They have goals in the world that they want to accomplish. We want to lift them up and give them a stronger chance to achieve their dreams."

The dedication of the selection committee, led by Jessica Albin, in finding deserving and resilient students is genuinely commendable. Their commitment to choosing academically strong individuals who exhibit leadership skills and possess the potential to make valuable contributions is pivotal in ensuring the program's success.

"We look for academically strong students who we are confident can succeed at the university level and will embrace the mentoring opportunities included in the Schmidt Foundation Scholars program," Jessica said. "We are looking for students who demonstrate clear leadership skills and who we believe will make valuable contributions to our university, the community of Hays, and the state of Kansas."

She went on to say that there is research that describes how purpose within our work, rather than passion or even happiness, is the best predictor of resilience and longevity in the workplace.

"There will always be mundane aspects of our jobs; we may not feel "passionate" about every single responsibility we have. But if we know that our work really matters because it changes lives, we are more likely to stick out those hard days. It is a blessing to be part of this committee because it is without question purposeful and life-changing," Jessica said.

Indeed, this program is changing lives while shaping the university and the communities we serve.

Bianca Bultman is in her third year at FHSU and is a member of the first class of Schmidt Foundation Scholars. Bianca grew up in Elkhart, Kansas. She is a junior majoring in nursing with dreams of becoming a labor and delivery nurse.

"I knew that Fort Hays State University had the best nursing program. Since I wanted to be the best possible nurse for my patients, I wanted to attend the FHSU," Bianca said.

Bianca worked tirelessly to save money for college, knowing that loans would be necessary. Her mother's encouragement and the Schmidt Foundation Scholars program gave her hope and the opportunity to change her life.

"Knowing that I could go to college and have a chance to change my family's life is the greatest gift," she said. "Because of this scholarship, I can continue my education and show my sisters that it is possible even when the odds are against us."

Josey Dove's story is another testament to the transformative power of education. She is a sophomore from Ozawkie, Kansas, majoring in music with a minor in psychology. Josey's dream is to become a music therapist.

Growing up, her dad had constantly told her how important education was. Her dad dropped out of high school. Later, he earned his GED. He always stressed to Josey that she had so much potential. She just had to be willing to work hard. He challenged her to build a better life than he did.

Her father's belief in her potential and hard work paid off when she received this scholarship.

Edwin Garcia-Arreola is a junior from Lakin, Kansas, majoring in Corporate Communications and translating and interpreting in Spanish. He is actively involved in the Dane G. Hansen Scholarship Hall community and the Spanish Club. These involvements align with his interests and provide opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The Schmidt Foundation Scholarship has relieved him of financial burdens and provided a supportive community. This scholarship has opened doors to networking opportunities, mentoring relationships, and friendships that he believes will extend beyond his college years. Edwin's family is incredibly proud, and the scholarship has alleviated their concerns regarding his education.

Edwin encourages new students to be confident in seeking guidance and support from upperclassmen and mentors and to be proactive in taking advantage of all the opportunities the scholarship offers, including etiquette training and networking events.

He highlights the importance of believing in oneself and recognizing one's potential to make a difference. He underscores that although this scholarship is an outstanding achievement, utilizing the services provided by FHSU at the Fischli-Wills Center for Student Success can be a game-changer for students as they navigate their college journey and transition into young adulthood.

Perhaps renowned actor and philanthropist Denzel Washington captured the essence of the Schmidt Foundation Scholars program when he said, "At the end of the day, it is not about what you have or even what you've accomplished... It's about who you've lifted up, who you've made better. It's about what you've given back."

The Schmidt Foundation Scholars program exemplifies the spirit of lifting up others, just as Denzel Washington's quote suggests. It provides financial assistance and instills a sense of purpose and the belief that dreams can be achieved despite challenging circumstances. It's heartening to see how this program is making a difference in the lives of these young scholars and their families.

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