

Heart of a Tiger: Celebrating our exceptional faculty at Fall Convocation

Just prior to the beginning of each academic year, Fort Hays State University hosts a convocation. We use this annual gathering to look back on our achievements, welcome new faculty and staff, discuss important campus-wide projects and programs, and provide an overview of the state of the university. We also close the ceremony with what I think is the most inspiring thing we do to kick off the new academic year - we honor outstanding faculty.

Traditionally we recognize faculty in three award categories during our fall convocation. The first is the Faculty Member of the Year award. The second is the John Heinrichs Outstanding Undergraduate Research Mentor, and the third is the President's Distinguished Scholar Award.

The **Faculty Member of the Year** selection process examines the past year's recipients of faculty awards for teaching, research and scholarly activity, and service. This year, the award was presented to Associate Professor of Physics Dr. C.D. Clark.

C.D. is known across this campus as a skilled problem solver and innovator in areas beyond his discipline, including work on delivering a high-quality educational experience for FHSU online learners. In the nomination letter submitted on C.D.'s behalf for this award, a colleague noted that while many initially rejected the idea of delivering laboratory courses online, C.D. rose to the challenge by developing the Engineering Physics II Lab as an online offering. C.D.'s course shifted the focus from using lab equipment to using open-source (free) analysis software widely used by scientists.

C.D. is simply an indispensable member of this campus community. He is a highly respected and inspirational teacher and mentor to his students. All of our professors are asked to teach, conduct research, and serve in roles that advance our campus community. Few excel in these three roles better than C.D. Clark.

The **John Heinrichs Outstanding Research Mentor Award** recognizes a faculty member for their commitment, time, and energy in promoting undergraduate research. The award is named after our esteemed former colleague, Dr. John Heinrichs, who was active in all research areas. This year's John Heinrichs Outstanding Research Mentor is Dr. Jeanne Sumrall.

An instructor in the Department of Geosciences and the Kansas Academy of Math and Science (KAMS), our two-year pre-college program for high school juniors and seniors, Jeanne is committed to supporting and mentoring students through the undergraduate research process.

Her personal investment in her students' growth is evidenced in their letters of support for her nomination. One student wrote: "Not only does Dr. Sumrall care immensely about promoting undergraduate projects for her students, but she also follows through as she engages with us and encourages a lifetime love of research."

Another student who submitted a nomination for this award noted how Jeanne allowed her to take the lead in directing projects by creating just the right balance between support and independence.

The final award presented at our fall convocation was the 2022 **President's Distinguished Scholar**. This year, the award went to Dr. April Terry, associate professor of criminal justice.

April's research focuses on issues critical to ensuring we are constantly striving to create a just and equitable society, including the areas of gender and crime, juvenile corrections, gender-based violence, and rural criminology. She has quickly become a widely respected expert in her field and serves on a number of boards and committees that focus on issues of crime and punishment. She has published eight book chapters, a remarkable 20 peer-reviewed journal articles, nine technical reports, and more than 100 presentations, with 48 including student researchers.

If you have read the news over the past several years, you know that seismic changes are coming to higher education. One thing that will never change at FHSU is our focus on core values - knowledge and scholarship, innovation and entrepreneurship, and global engagement. These values guide us, shape us, and influence how we work together to create an unmatched educational experience for our students.

Not a day goes by that I am not reminded of the remarkable people who make this university a special place. Our fall convocation award winners are another reminder of something that makes me proud to serve as the president of Fort Hays State University.