

## Heart of a Tiger: FHSU student Tanner Callis discusses the power of scholarships

I often smile when I think about the Winston Churchill quote, “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Fort Hays State University continues to be abundantly blessed by the generosity of so many philanthropists. Those gifts are game-changers. They help us provide state-of-the-art facilities, honor and inspire faculty and open doors of opportunity to many students.

I have a deeply grateful heart for our philanthropists. Because their imprint on our university is so profound, I often find myself searching for the right words and the right ways to say “thank you.” That is why I soaked up every word expressed by graduate student Tanner Callis, who is completing his master’s degree in English.

I’d like to share Tanner’s story in his own words. The following is his beautiful expression of impact:

Every scholarship carries with it a story. The gift of an alumna or alumnus. The goodwill of a loved one. The charity of a friend. And as scholarships are given and received by students, the stories attached to them become intertwined with our own personal experiences in academia. I believe the endowing of an educational scholarship is a reflection of our shared trust in one another across generations. Today, I am pleased to share a bit about my story of scholarship.

Growing up in Hays, I was one of a blooming batch of annual Hays High School seniors who had to decide whether to pursue higher education either abroad—as in daring outside the comfort zone and finding a new school in a foreign city or state—or attend here at Fort Hays, my local college and the home of that familiar Tiger Gold.

Of course, I chose the latter, not only because Fort Hays offers a quality education at a student-friendly price but also because I had earned a scholarship that was transferable only to a handful of Midwest colleges. (And if I was going to go and do this college thing, I was convinced at the time that it had to either be *here* or somewhere along the coast. My decision-making process at the time was based on what I would call dreaming high-schooler logic. Ultimately, I went where the scholarship took me.

And I’m not alone in my decision. Many of us—hundreds of us, perhaps thousands, even—choose Fort Hays because this school offers attainable scholarships where many others do not. We’re here on basketball, soccer, and volleyball scholarships. We’re here on scholarships for painting, ceramics, graphic design, band, orchestra, and choir. Many of us are here on English, history, philosophy, Biology, chemistry, mathematics, business, communication, nursing, or teaching scholarships. I’ve talked to fellow students from all across campus, and many of them are here on scholarship for one craft or another.

So, there I am, standing amidst a handful of other psychology scholarship recipients my freshman year, none of us having formally met a single faculty member before the department had already considered us worthy of scholarships more than five months prior. And that’s because the committees involved in selecting these recipients read our resumes, report cards, and recommendation letters. They decided to invest in us before we even decided to invest in this school. It sounds like a risky environment, and it kind of is. But the risks, more often than not, *are* worth taking.

Thanks to scholarships from the Department of Psychology and the Department of Music (I play cello in the Hays Symphony), I did not have to disproportionately pay out of pocket for textbooks for *any* of my classes that first year. Not only that, there was runoff. Looking back, those departmental scholarships probably paid for the majority of the materials I needed for any of my amazing psych courses. Combined with my community scholarship, which covered fees and tuition, I didn't drop a penny on Fort Hays classes. It's almost ridiculous. Here in the 2020s, and no fees. Incredible. And it's all thanks to scholarships.

Perhaps my hard work and resulting good fortune helped me decide to arrange for another investment in Fort Hays State University. In the fall of 2021, I enrolled in the English department's program for a Master of Arts. Here again, I was presented with—you guessed it—a scholarship—the Eleanor Bogart scholarship. This scholarship bought me expert-approved copies of *Le Morte D'arthur*, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (with letters of critical review), and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* covering The Middle Ages. There's a lot to be excited about here—take my word for it.

The jump from psychology undergrad to English M.A. questions many, sometimes even myself. As an undergraduate, I continuously tacked on an English course every semester. World Fiction. Survey of American History. Advanced Composition. There was no pressing need to complete Gen Ed credits, so I know it had become a conscious decision at some point. Twenty-one credit hours later, I walked across the commencement stage with my B.S. in psychology, an English minor, and a cumulative 4.0 GPA, along with the confidence to start a new chapter in my life.

This chapter will just so happen to come to a close this spring. As I near the end of my M.A. degree, I look back on a six-year academic career at FHSU. "So many people got me to where I am today." It's a thought that often comes to mind when we begin to see the light at the end of a long tunnel. Family, teachers, colleagues, coworkers—even the retired neighbors on my block who see me getting in and out of my car five times a day. These people were all integral to my ability to complete my degree. But the *failure* to include scholarships in bolstering my academic and financial situation would be most erroneous.

Currently, I am using my writing and editing strengths as the publicity writer for the Hays Symphony here in town. I've been a cello player in the orchestra for almost a decade now, so it's nice to be able to give back and get involved in a new way. As a publicity intern, I gained experience writing copy for posters and other promotional materials, generating content for our website, and managing content for our social media platforms, primarily Facebook and Instagram. Plus, I get to help out my longtime mentor Cathy Drabkin, the brilliant baker behind Cathy's Breads, who was also once an English M.A. student herself. Maybe the similarities add up to why we get along so well.

Where does all this effort lead? What's the goal after this?" Those are the big questions. After graduation, I hope to attend the Denver Publishing Institute. There, I will be able to leverage my reading, writing, and editing experiences and become a more skilled professional. But also, the publishing world demands an understanding of different viewpoints, negotiation skills, presentation formality, business instinct, and a good eye for appealing content. I want to work with writers who articulate thoughts, feelings, and

emotions through character, plot, and setting. I also want to try my hand at technical writing someday. And I think I'd like to work in writing and editing textbooks instead of solely reading them. Academia is, for many people, a circular journey.

And so, in this next chapter of my life, I will continue to experiment, explore, and acquire new knowledge. Fort Hays State University met me at a time when I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, and through challenge, helped me figure that out. Now, I plan to put my cumulative experience to the test. Tough times await, no doubt, but as I've been told before numerous times—and reinforced through being a scholarship recipient—I *am* a person who can meet these demands head-on. (Callis, 2022)