

## **Responsiveness, positivity, kindness: That is Fort Hays State**

At Fort Hays State University, our number one priority is taking care of our students. We work intentionally to create a level of personalized care that goes beyond friendly and nice. Tiger Nation connects deeply and sincerely. Our welcome is genuine. From Day One, faculty and staff invest in each student, taking time to make one-on-one contact, build confidence, and nurture each Tiger to their personal success.

The best evidence of this philosophy can be witnessed at the annual Fischli's Excellence in Higher Education annual banquet, hosted by the Fort Hays Honor Society. Students gather to celebrate, thank, and honor the faculty and staff members who made Fort Hays State a remarkable experience. It is indeed one of my favorite events. I always leave there joyful and thankful for our incredible faculty and staff who care so deeply for our students.

This year was no exception. The keynote speaker, Dr. David Fitzhugh, gave a heartfelt presentation on connecting with students. Every Monday morning, Dr. Fitzhugh, associate professor of health and human performance, asks his students about their weekend. He creates an environment where everyone connects with one another and shares about their life. He also takes time to notice when someone doesn't appear to "be themselves" and reaches out to them in private.

Dr. Fitzhugh shared a beautiful story of a student who started to withdraw. The professor noticed. He followed up. It made a difference. A couple of years after that student graduated and went on to have a successful career, she wrote Dr. Fitzhugh a letter to let him know the deep impact his outreach had on her life during a very difficult time.

During the banquet dinner, I marveled at the genuine exchange among the people at my table – two faculty members and five students. Ken Windholz, instructor of psychology, was talking with Jozlyn Brown, a student who commutes from Russell. Part of their conversation was about texting for clarification on assignments and class materials. I mentioned how amazed I was that the students had their faculty members' cell phone numbers. The students at the table indicated they had the cell phone numbers of many of their professors.

Also at my table was Dr. Emily Weber, an instructor of biological sciences. Windholz shared how impressed he was with Dr. Weber's ability and dedication to learn the names of every student. He shared that she arrived early to her classes, stood at the door, and greeted every student by name. Each of her classes had between 35 and 48 students. Another student shared that she had Dr. Weber for one class and enthusiastically agreed how special her daily greetings were. The next semester, this student bumped into Dr. Weber, who greeted her by name and asked her how she was doing. Extraordinary!

And then there was the story of Dr. Robert Lloyd, assistant professor of management. The fact that he teaches management is even more significant to this account. Apparently, in Dr. Lloyd's class, there is a final paper due. Then, on the scheduled exam day, students gather in the class. Their final exam is to name every student in the class and say something you learned about each one. That is what I call modeling the way. I love that!

Story after story, students talked about how faculty and staff nurtured a sense of belonging and how that feeling of mattering helped them succeed at Fort Hays State. Our faculty facilitate relationships that intentionally create environments to prepare them for a truly prosperous future.

Because our engagement with each student matters deeply to us, we deliver a high-value education based on responsiveness, positivity, and kindness. That is Fort Hays State University.

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