

Heart of a Tiger: Celebrating success, part 5

9/27/24

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HAYS, Kan - As I conclude this five-part series on the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan at Fort Hays State University (FHSU), I want to proudly highlight our fifth and final strategic goal. This goal focuses on Community and Global Engagement and encapsulates our commitment to cultivating impactful partnerships that resonate within our institution and extend to our local, national, and global communities.

Our desired outcomes for this goal were to annually develop or enhance innovative partnerships that bolster community, regional, or state economic prosperity. Additionally, we aimed to meet all requirements for classification as a Carnegie Community Engaged university—an important reflection of FHSU's mission to develop global citizen leaders.

As we reflect on our strides in delivering this outcome, I am invigorated by the transformative partnerships we continue to forge and the achievements that define our collective efforts. Our journey has been marked by resilience and innovation, from launching the Cybersecurity Institute and Technology Incubator (CITI) to establishing a Professional and Continuing Education Unit.

The Cybersecurity Institute and Technology Incubator, a direct response to the Kansas Board of Regents' (KBOR) call for higher education institutions to actively contribute to Kansas's economic prosperity, is a prime example of our responsiveness. Leveraging FHSU's National Security Agency Center for Academic Excellence accreditation, CITI provides students with hands-on experiences through micro-internships and supports local businesses in improving their cybersecurity strategies.

Despite the expected challenges of establishing infrastructure and marketing, we remain unwavering in our commitment to the CITI initiative. Interim Dean of the Robbins College of Business and Entrepreneurship Melissa Hunsicker-Walburn aptly stated, "The CITI initiative exemplifies our continued commitment to our mission and service area as an institution. We create impactful opportunities for students to learn while engaging with our communities and businesses to address the growing challenge of cyber threats and cybercrime."

We also achieved a groundbreaking partnership between the Robbins Banking Institute and the Kansas Bankers Association, reinforcing our commitment to community engagement and educational excellence. Our strategic affiliations with two technical colleges—Fort Hays Tech Northwest and Fort Hays Tech North Central—further enhance our commitment to workforce development and addressing local economic needs.

Another notable achievement was establishing the first state-wide community college articulation agreement, guaranteeing all community college-trained registered nurses' admission to the nursing program. This agreement streamlines pathways for aspiring nurses and strengthens Kansas's healthcare workforce, illustrating our partnerships' profound impact on regional health outcomes.

In collaboration with the Kansas College of Osteopathic Medicine, we launched an accelerated 3+4 pathway that enables our students to start their first year of medical school during their

senior year at FHSU. This innovative pathway expedites the educational journey for future healthcare professionals and exemplifies our commitment to producing well-prepared, engaged leaders in the medical field.

Our efforts extend to supporting criminal justice initiatives, with FHSU becoming the host site for the National De-escalation Training Center – Central Region. This designation allows us to provide critical training that equips law enforcement professionals and community leaders with essential skills, ultimately fostering safer communities.

As we explored Goal Five, the journey was not without obstacles. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges just months after initiating our Five-Year Strategic Plan. In response, we formed the Civic Learning and Engagement Advisory Board to navigate these unprecedented times. This board organically evolved into the Campus Community Collaborative (3C), now an active body focused on strengthening relationships and increasing programmatic bandwidth across our campus.

Unexpected successes during this time included our expanded institutional memberships in organizations like Imagining America (IA) and the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE). These memberships have opened new avenues for student scholarships, faculty professional development, and an enhanced culture of engagement on campus.

We are particularly grateful for Provost Arensdorf's unwavering dedication to making community engagement an institutional priority. This commitment resonates throughout our campus culture, encouraging faculty and staff to pursue initiatives that create a lasting impact on both students and the communities we serve.

A significant milestone was reached when FHSU submitted its application for the Leadership for Public Purpose elective classification for the Carnegie Foundation on December 15, 2023. On May 17, 2024, we were thrilled to learn that FHSU had been awarded this prestigious classification through 2030. This recognition places us among only 25 institutions nationwide and marks FHSU as the only university in Kansas to receive this distinction.

Receiving the Carnegie Foundation's Leadership for Public Purpose classification is a remarkable achievement and a testament to our consistent alignment with our mission. The foundation acknowledges universities that demonstrate their commitment to enhancing teaching, research, and service missions to develop leaders who engage with and serve the greater good. This classification validates the hard work and dedication the FHSU community has invested in cultivating partnerships and engaging with our diverse communities.

As we reflect on these accomplishments, I am filled with pride in our recognition and the authenticity of our mission. We are living out our commitment to developing global citizen leaders, evident in our work that transcends traditional boundaries. Our impact can be seen in Hays, across Kansas, and beyond.

As we progress through the final stage of our strategic plan, we remain committed to fostering innovative partnerships that drive regional educational and economic advancement. Our continuous growth in community engagement will only empower us to hone our strategies further and expand the programs that benefit our students and the communities we serve.

Our work within our communities will evolve, but our core focus will remain—supporting students, enhancing educational pathways, and comprehensively addressing community needs. As we look toward the future, we will persist in seizing opportunities to expand our reach and deepen our engagement, ensuring that FHSU remains a leader in community and global partnerships.

This five-part series has illuminated the significant work that FHSU undertakes across all strategic goals, and Goal Five epitomizes our dedication to meaningful engagement. The profound partnerships and initiatives established reflect our values and commitment to education as a force for good. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this vital work. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact, inspiring and empowering future generations of global leaders.

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