

Fort Hays State University Introduces New Business Retention and Expansion Program

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - I am excited to share that Fort Hays State University (FHSU) is set to launch its Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) credential program, a new program created by our Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) unit. This initiative will kick off with a pilot program this May and June, thanks to FHSU's strategic affiliation with Fort Hays Tech | North Central and Fort Hays Tech | Northwest, all aimed at advancing economic prosperity in rural Kansas.

The BRE credential empowers local leaders with the skills and strategies to tackle the unique challenges of doing business in rural Kansas. With business sustainability being crucial for local economies, this program seeks to enhance the capabilities of economic development professionals, local government officials, and community members. The impact of this initiative should be profound, as it translates economic insights into actions that strengthen community ties and bolster business resilience.

Participants in the pilot program will explore important topics such as stakeholder engagement, effective communication, negotiation, and strategic planning, all tailored specifically to rural contexts. Participants will also engage in practical activities, including listening tours to identify business needs, informative case studies of successful initiatives, and data analysis workshops to address pressing issues like workforce shortages. My tech college president colleagues and I are investing our own time and effort into this important initiative.

The course designer and instructor, Dr. Andrea Luoma, said, "We are thrilled to launch this program, which not only responds to current economic challenges but also encourages long-term growth." As a business retention and expansion specialist, Dr. Luoma brings expertise as a certified NeuroLeadership and communication consultant and executive coach. Dr. Luoma is a BRE Certified Coordinator (BREC) through the International Association for Business Retention and Expansion as well as through the University of Minnesota. She emphasizes the importance of effective communication in every interaction, highlighting how it can build trust and foster collaboration.

An emerging leadership collaboration between the presidents of the three affiliated Fort Hays institutions and local community leaders will further enhance the program, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and strategies among the various organizations.

The benefits of the BRE credential program are expected to be significant. Participants will develop essential leadership skills, gain valuable resources, and work together to create personalized action plans to help retain businesses. Local organizations stand to gain from increased job growth and stronger local economies—vital for sustaining vibrant communities.

Looking ahead, FHSU plans to expand the BRE program and is considering a new Business Succession Planning course to address additional rural economic sustainability needs. These initiatives reflect FHSU's commitment to creating a lifelong learning environment that supports ongoing professional development throughout every career stage.

FHSU collaborates closely with local businesses and economic networks, ensuring that the curriculum evolves with industry demands. This approach positions the university as a key player in strengthening rural resilience, combining education with impactful community efforts.

The BRE credential is just one of many offerings of the Professional and Continuing Education unit at FHSU, and the work of the BRE team is laser-focused on empowering professionals and uplifting communities.

As the BRE credential program rolls out, FHSU aims to help our rural Kansas communities adapt to economic shifts and thrive, creating an environment where local talent can grow and communities flourish.

For more about Professional and Continuing Education and the developing catalog of skills-based programs, go to:

https://issuu.com/forthays/docs/pce_vision_ebook_fhsu_v3.2?fr=xKAE9_zU1NQ