

Heart of a Tiger: Meet Josie Gage, a pathfinding future teacher

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - Since its early days as a “normal school,” or teacher’s college, FHSU has gone by several names: Western Branch of the Kansas Normal School, Fort Hays State Kansas State Normal School, Kansas State Teachers College of Hays, and Fort Hays State College. One central fact that has been at the core of all these changes is that Fort Hays State has been training teachers for more than 120 years. Our Department of Teacher Education signs nearly 1,000 teaching license applications annually.

Rising senior Josie Gage, a pathfinding future teacher, is from Maple City in Cowley County, Kansas. She knew at an early age that she learned best and thoroughly enjoyed hands-on learning, especially building things out of wood in shop class.

“I made all sorts of furniture in high school shop class,” Josie said. “I made a nightstand, a dresser, and bookshelves. For my senior project, I designed and built my own desk.”

Initially, Josie wanted to be an architecture major and began her college career with this in mind. Very early on, she realized the program would not be as hands-on or give her the opportunity to make the impact she wanted.

“The first year in the program mostly involved manual drafting and learning the basic principles of architecture,” Josie said.

Her desire to make an impact on others was a big factor in her decision to transfer. She thought she might be able to make that impact as a teacher. Josie shared her frustration with her boss, where she worked as a student employee in the Architecture Department’s construction shop. Like her high school shop teacher, her boss happened to be a graduate of FHSU’s Applied Technology program.

Josie decided that she wanted to be a shop teacher because she’d seen through her own experiences that it can be a daunting subject for most students. “My goal is to change that for my students, no matter how long they are in my classroom,” Josie said.

She had heard much about the FHSU program from her high school shop teacher. When Josie, her dad, and her brother visited FHSU, she loved what she found.

I call Josie a pathfinder for several reasons. She is currently the only female enrolled in the technology and engineering program and in a degree track that will lead to becoming a teacher.

She is also a pathfinder in how she dove into a student leadership role in the Applied Technology Department.

Since transferring to FHSU in 2022, she has served as an officer in the university’s Technology and Engineering Education Collegiate Association (TEECA) chapter. Josie then successfully applied to join TEECA’s National Student Officer Team and served as the President-Elect for the

2023-2024 school year, where she helped organize TEECA events for the annual International Technology and Engineering Educators (ITEEA) conference in Memphis, Tennessee. She will serve as president for the 2024-2025 academic year and will be leading the team to prepare for the 2025 ITEEA conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

Zach Pixler, an assistant professor in the Department of Applied Technology, said this of Josie: “She has become an integral part of our organization. Her work ethic, attention to detail, and organization skills, along with her ability to foster positive relationships with her peers, make her a very strong leader.”

This remarkable young woman is also a pathfinder in the way she has represented FHSU in typically male-dominated national competitions in her chosen discipline. At the most recent ITEEA conference in March, she was awarded the ITEEA Foundation Undergraduate Scholarship and earned National Champion honors in the Teaching Lesson competition. Her winning lesson involved amplifying the soundwaves from a cell phone playing Elvis Presley's music by placing the phone in a laser-cut all-wood box amplifier.

Josie looks forward to the opportunity to make a difference in her classroom, community, and professional field. This fall, she will complete a 40-hour internship observing a shop teacher in a secondary school. Next spring, she will complete her capstone student teaching experience. She wants to do that close to Hays so she can remain involved in TEECA and her Applied Technology community at FHSU.

Josie will graduate in May 2025. She is very well-prepared for her career and ready to serve where she is most needed. And thanks to FHSU's commitment to affordability and several scholarships Josie earned, including the Kansas Board of Regents funded Kansas Teacher Service Scholarship, she will graduate debt-free.

“My goal is to get through college debt-free. And as it stands now, I'm gonna make it,” Josie said.

Originally, Josie didn't see herself as a pathfinder. She picked this academic degree and career path because she just wanted to be happy. Since then, she's realized the great need for role models like her in technology education, especially for women.

“I want to show my students that a career involving building cool stuff is a great choice, but one that involves teaching students to become builders themselves is an even better one.”

Simply put, Josie wants to serve as a champion for promoting teaching technology and engineering education as a rewarding career choice.

“Even if I never find someone like me in this field, I still want to be that example for others,” Josie said. “I know that as a teacher, I will have the power to change the lives of my students, and with my experiences at FHSU, I will be ready for that challenge.”