

Heart of a Tiger: Celebrating International Education Week

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - Fort Hays State University (FHSU) celebrates International Education Week (IEW) each November. This annual celebration highlights global diversity, advances cross-cultural understanding, gives voice to the perspectives of our international students, and enhances the educational experience for the entire campus community.

International Education Week is more than festive gatherings; it celebrates humanity. Students from around the globe come together to share their customs, languages, and traditions. This fall, our on-campus international student enrollment includes 200 students from 45 different countries. As part of this intentional community, all students are encouraged to explore and appreciate the cultural mosaic that enriches their lives and learning experiences.

Amadou Diawara, a first-year MBA student from Dakar, Senegal, is a prime example of the transformative journey fostered by FHSU. "I initially joined FHSU as part of the first cohort from Dunis Dakar, a partner university in Senegal," Amadou shares. "The welcoming environment and strong academic support drew me in, and the opportunity to study locally and abroad is invaluable."

Nurturing cross-cultural ties opens doors to understanding and collaboration on a global scale, Amadou's aspirations extend beyond his time at FHSU; he hopes to return to Senegal after gaining U.S. work experience and apply his newly acquired skills to develop startups that can positively impact his community.

Lucas Billinger's path to FHSU is equally inspiring. Hailing from Linz, Austria, Lucas is in his third year at the university, pursuing a degree in finance and an education that once seemed far from his reach. "If you had asked the 16-year-old me if I wanted to study in another country, I would have said no," he reveals. "But after my military service, I was uncertain about my next steps."

Encouraged by his father's colleague's son's experiences, he considered studying in the United States. "After some reflection, I realized that if I didn't take this chance now, I might never get another opportunity."

After extensive research, FHSU emerged as the perfect fit. "It checked every box on my checklist," he recalls, highlighting the university's welcoming atmosphere and vital support services. "And when I saw how affordable it was compared to other U.S. schools, my decision was solidified. As an international student, that was incredibly important."

Lucas's journey at FHSU has profoundly changed his outlook—one that he publicly credits to his supportive parents and the International Office, who have guided him through this transitional period. "The support I've received has been exceptional. I truly appreciate everything they've done to help me navigate this journey," he says.

Students like Lucas thrive in campus activities, from joining friends at soccer games to immersing themselves in the cultural diversity fostered by events during IEW. "My experience here has been amazing," he declares with enthusiasm. "GO TIGERS!"

International students also contribute economically to FHSU and the surrounding community—paying tuition, participating in local businesses, enriching the local culture—and fostering an atmosphere of cross-cultural exchange essential in today’s globalized world.

Through interactions with their peers, they gain invaluable interpersonal skills that employers seek in future leaders. The diverse perspectives brought to classroom discussions stimulate creativity and encourage critical thinking. Amy Liu, a master’s student from China, elaborates on this point: “Cross-cultural experiences challenge us to think critically, and they inspire innovative approaches to problem-solving,” she says.

The robust partnerships FHSU has built over decades reinforce its commitment to global education, fostering collaboration that enhances its international profile. These efforts lead to unique study-abroad opportunities and cooperative research initiatives that further enrich the educational landscape for all students.

For Amy Liu, the memories created during IEW remain profoundly uplifting. “The celebration made me feel connected to my roots while surrounded by friends from various backgrounds,” she shares. “It reminds me of the joy of sharing my culture and learning from others.”

The vast array of events planned during IEW emphasizes the importance of global citizenship and its impact on each individual’s worldview. By engaging with diverse cultures, students deepen their understanding of international issues and develop empathy—qualities crucial to fostering cooperation in today’s complex global landscape.

The impact of IEW celebrations emphasizes that education is a universal passport. Preparing to meet the challenges of an interconnected world continues to shape FHSU as it nurtures students equipped to thrive in diverse environments.

The university’s commitment extends to empowering all students with the tools to navigate various global challenges. Amadou notes, “Understanding the interconnectedness of our world equips us to create positive change, whether in America or back in Senegal.”

Both Amadou and Lucas underscore the meaningful contributions of international students to campus life. Stories of resilience, ambition, and cultural pride exemplify the ideals celebrated during International Education Week, highlighting the importance of a supportive educational environment that values and fosters global cooperation.

What I appreciate most about IEW is the connections that bring students closer together, reinforcing the idea that while their journeys may have originated in different corners of the globe, they are united by a shared purpose: to learn, to grow, and ultimately, to make a difference in the world. With a spirit of cooperation and cultural sharing, IEW provides a space where every student can find their place, fostering a community that supports growth, empathy, and understanding—one story at a time.