

## **FHSU's greatest gift: Remaining Tiger Strong**

Even though we approach this holiday season amidst the pandemic, I am constantly reminded of the power of always being joyful and thankful in all circumstances. Or, as Viktor Frankl said, "Everything can be taken from a man or a woman but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Inspired by Viktor Frankl, and frankly, so many colleagues and community members, I would like to offer just a few observations of the blessings that have continued to propel Fort Hays State University forward this year.

Our "in-the-trench" outreach efforts from our faculty and staff care teams kept students enrolled. The contributions of countless caring hearts stocked our Tiger food pantry and supplemented the student emergency fund. All across campus, I continue to see an ethic of care that is distinctively FHSU.

All areas of campus have had to adjust operations to open and operate the campus in as safe and effective a manner as possible. From our facilities staff to our students, faculty and emergency team, we have worked collectively to mitigate the risk of transmission of the coronavirus in the classroom. Our own campus proactive steps – including social distancing, hand hygiene, use of face coverings, monitoring our personal health and making the thoughtful decision to stay home if we feel unwell – have been embraced. We have also carefully monitored our capacity to isolate and quarantine on-campus students. As a result, our campus remains open.

Our online graduate education programs saw enrollment growth with an increase of 90 students this fall. Online graduate education has increased nine of the last 10 years.

The Kelly Center provided a record-breaking 4,084 personal counseling sessions last year, in addition to services in the following areas: alcohol and drug counseling services, student accessibility issues through learning disability testing and accommodations and academic counseling and peer tutoring. This year, they are on schedule to set a new record of wrap-around support services. A grant is expanding the Kelly Center's reach to assist students enrolled in online classes and Zoom sessions.

I am deeply appreciative of our Teaching Innovation and Learning Technologies staff, who continue to support both faculty and students with cutting-edge, engaging learning technologies. They have been working tirelessly, supporting Tigers throughout the United States and across the world – including making sure that students in China could access all of their class materials through their cell phones and creating tutorial videos in Mandarin to ensure students' success.

The Higher Learning Commission approved a new master's degree in athletic training. This is essential, as the industry standard now requires a master's degree for entry-level professionals. We also launched online bachelor's and master's degree programs in social work. Both programs exceeded their first-year enrollment goals this fall, as did our expanding computer science program.

We have teams of colleagues working on new cybersecurity initiatives and studying future possibilities of how artificial intelligence can help drive student success.

COVID couldn't stop students and parents from seeing the value of our Academy of Mathematics and Science. This early entry college program offers an unparalleled academic experience for gifted and

talented high school students from our own backyard and to students from all over the world. We welcomed a new class of 37 juniors this year.

Every day I watch our new Fischli-Wills Center for Student Success, powered by philanthropy, come to life. The center, scheduled for completion by fall 2021, is a one-stop shop for student success. From academic and career support to student health and counseling, the three-story building attached to the Memorial Union will feature student services for mind, body and soul.

The Journey Campaign, our most ambitious fundraising campaign to date, is on schedule to exceed our goal of \$100 million by Homecoming 2021. Each and every gift means an education, a strong university, a bright future, lives changed and dreams made real for students. Incredible!

Our Tiger Auction for athletics was converted to a virtual event, and our fans did not let us down. Our philanthropists continued to fuel the success of our teams. Scholarships were honored, while coaches concentrated on meaningful practice sessions as well as structure and routine for the student-athletes. November arrived with the optimism of our student-athletes being able to return to play.

Despite the strains the pandemic placed on our community, an enduring point of pride remains the strong town-and-gown relationship we enjoy in Hays, America. Fort Hays State is blessed by a long legacy of strong leaders and a community that rallies its support around the university in many ways. Through it all, our caretaking of the present – while planning for the future – thrived.

The work we do matters. Like a pebble tossed in a pond, our impact ripples across families, communities and the world. Alphonse Karr said, “we can complain because rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorns have roses.” Amid an unprecedented year, I choose to rejoice – and remain forever grateful for the opportunity to work with my talented colleagues at this extraordinary university.

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