

With alumna's vision, professional dress becomes another student service at Fort Hays State

In the mid-1970s, researcher John Molloy wrote "Dress for Success" – a book about the impact of clothing on a person's success in professional and personal life. The results of his scientific research demonstrated that perceptions matter. Early in my career I was coached to dress for the job you aspire to rather than the job you currently occupy. I found that advice to be wise.

On Friday, Feb. 16, joined by the Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors, Fort Hays State University held a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate Tailored for Tigers – a professional clothing closet for all FHSU students. The closet provides professional clothing appropriate for interviews, business presentations, career fairs, or other professional activities.

Student success has always been at the core of everything we do at FHSU. We focus on opportunity by keeping our tuition low and providing scholarships. We deliver a myriad of student support services facilitated by a faculty and staff who focus on student achievement from application to graduation and beyond. Tailored for Tigers is another great example of how our ethic of care and attention to a holistic student experience contributes to a post-graduation success rate of 96 percent for acceptance into graduate or professional school or employment within six months of graduation.

I know our dedicated and very talented faculty create learning experiences that produce outstanding, highly qualified graduates. But as Molloy demonstrated, it takes more than just knowledge to successfully navigate one's career. As the Tailored for Tigers website says: "A nice appearance is an investment in your career. An interviewer's decision not to hire an applicant is usually made within the first thirty seconds of an interview. That's a lot of sizing up in a little time – mostly on the basis of your appearance." The site goes on to indicate that about 80 percent of that impression comes before a word is spoken, and that the more professional a person looks not only increases the chance of being hired but may also increase the starting salary by as much as 8 to 20 percent!

We know that some of our students do not have the financial means to purchase professional attire. Others may have clothing back home but long distances – from out of state to out of country – may hinder a student's ability to get the required clothing in time for an important opportunity that may arise spontaneously. Regardless of the situation, Tailored for Tigers is a readily accessible service for FHSU students.

I always enjoy learning the story behind the story, which in this case began with alumna Jessica Thompson, a high school business teacher who graduated in 2013 with two degrees. Jessica mentioned to her former professor and Collegiate DECA adviser Scott Jones that she was in need of materials for her classroom. As they explored her vision, a poster campaign on business attire for men and women was created. Working with Professor Jones, FHSU student Felix Albl led the effort to create the campaign. Current students served as models and eight posters depicting business and business casual attire for men and for women were produced and mailed to high schools throughout the state. Those posters continue to be requested.

Fueled with passion and a vision for something impactful on campus, the team set out to create the professional clothing closet. Felix and Professor Jones found stores that were closing and called to acquire clothing racks, mirrors, and other store essentials. Faculty, staff, and community members donated clothing. Key partnerships were formed: Deb Ludwig, dean of Forsyth Library, offered space in the library to house the program; Karen McCullough, director of Career Services, stepped up to staff the closet; and Master Cleaners signed on as a corporate sponsor providing dry cleaning services. Thus, a meaningful new FHSU program was born thanks to the inspiration of Jessica Thompson, the vision of Felix and Professor Jones, the long-term commitment of Career Services, and the generosity of the Master Cleaners, the library, and many others who continue to donate time, talent and treasure. Tailored for Tigers is indeed another example of heart and home alive at FHSU!

Tailored for Tigers (fhsu.edu/Tailored-for-Tigers) is always accepting donations. New or gently used professional attire may be dropped off at Career Services (Sheridan Hall 214) or Master Cleaners (200 West Eighth St.); monetary contributions may also be sent to the FHSU Foundation.