

## **Education at Fort Hays State: Involving everyone in life-long search for knowledge**

One of the many things I love about Fort Hays State University is that our focus is not only on students. We focus on all learners. Fort Hays State is about each of us – students, administrative assistants, service workers, staff, professors and president – becoming better versions of ourselves while contributing to a better FHSU every day.

An organization that has learners at its center focuses on a culture that respects inquiry, risk-taking, and experimentation while embracing the notion that the best thinking happens in community. I love Benjamin Franklin's quote: "If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking."

Learner-centered organizations are also focused on the creation of knowledge and on innovation – core values at FHSU. Because we expand our capacity to learn, new fields emerge and new majors are created to respond to emerging new careers. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor indicates that 65 percent of today's school children will eventually be employed in jobs that have not even been imagined! To prepare future students for a career that has not even been conceived is a daunting task that will require nimble, experimental universities like FHSU.

I learn every day by paying attention and listening to students, staff, and faculty. Learning is not necessarily one-directional. I know faculty will tell you that they learn from their students constantly and that students learn much from their peers, not just from professors.

Here are a couple of other examples of learning in action at FHSU:

Our Teaching Innovation and Learning Technologies provides the FHSU teaching community with a range of programs and services centered on effective teaching and new ways of learning. Our goal is to enhance student success and professional development by providing workshops, individual consultation, course development support and special programs.

Dr. Andreas Maheras, track and field coach, published an article in the February 2018 issue of "Techniques," the official publication of the U.S. Track and Field Association. The article, "Biomechanical Observations in Hammer Throwing: Distinguishing the Static and the Dynamic," analyzes the biomechanical aspects of the hammer throw event. The article challenges existing coaching practices and presents little-known characteristics of the basic phases of the hammer throw.

Undergraduate research takes many forms within departments at FHSU, but the unifying concept is collaborative faculty-student work on scholarly projects with the goal of developing generalizable, peer-reviewed work as a final product. Undergraduate research can be one of the most meaningful experiences at Fort Hays State. Students can learn through hands-on work outside the classroom, develop research skills, identify their academic and career interests, develop working relationships with faculty mentors and get a glimpse into graduate or professional school life.

As I write this, several members of our student affairs staff are learning alongside colleagues who share the responsibility for a campus-wide focus on the student experience. I know they will return to campus with expanded knowledge and the inspiration to continue to advance student success.

Our students often engage in community service projects. When those experiences are learner-centered, students enter the project with a deeper understanding of the issue the service project is designed to address. Then they follow up the activity with more profound conversations on what they learned. This process develops “engaged global citizen-leaders” – FHSU’s mission.

Fort Hays State is a magnet for learning opportunities outside of the classroom. We create makerspaces and host numerous lectures, workshops, concerts, and wellness events. We even have our very own Center for Entrepreneurship to promote interdisciplinary innovation and entrepreneurial initiatives.

As for me, I have been busy learning more about the Kansas Legislature as well as the current state of excellence at Fort Hays State. I have thoroughly enjoyed my visits to academic departments and am gaining a strong sense of our cutting-edge distinction as well as challenges and opportunities in our midst.

I have also spent a lot of time thinking about how we make decisions at the university. I have enjoyed in-depth conversations with our vice presidents, deans, presidents of the faculty and staff senates, as well as student government leaders and a myriad of others. I look forward to more conversations about how we lead together – what we do well and how we can improve both individually and collectively. Those conversations require courage and authentic communication – and through them I always learn a lot about myself and about our leadership team. Those discussions help me think differently and more deeply about leading FHSU.

John F. Kennedy once said, “Leadership and learning are indispensable to one another.” I agree, and I’m excited to rediscover that learners are the heart of Fort Hays State University.