

## **In the Fort Hays State family, you can go home again**

Life happens, an expression used in part to describe situations that distract us from our plans. Sometimes those distractions lead us down new, exciting paths. Sometimes not. I think about that phrase, “life happens,” often in my own life. It reminds me to be reflective, resilient, and make a plan for my next step – not my whole life.

When I went off to college, my mom gave me great advice. She said, “Take one class and each semester at a time. Work hard. No matter what happens, no one will be able to take away the classes you completed.” When college got challenging, I remembered those words, dug deep and kept going to class – completing my degree one day at a time.

Over the years, as I focused my career on paying forward the opportunity to earn a degree, I came to realize that sometimes the challenges people face in college require them, for all the right reasons, to “stop out” – to pause rather than to quit. Indeed, life happens. But the great thing about a college education, as my mom reminded me, is that the door of opportunity always remains open. That is especially true at Fort Hays State University – an institution focused on heart and home.

While we respect students’ decisions to stop out, we remind them that at FHSU the door of opportunity *is* always open. Our university is home – a home where we care about our students, their hopes and dreams. That front door is sort of an antidote to “life happens” by providing a renewed opportunity and a plan. We accomplish this through our Tiger Comeback program.

Tiger Comeback re-engages Fort Hays State students who had to stop out. This is a proactive campaign, checking in with our Tigers periodically to see if now is the time to return. In 2010, our first outreach initiative resulted in 115 students coming back to FHSU. That is incredible!

As we continue to develop the program, we are grateful for a new partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation that builds on an initiative begun by a donation from Dolores Borgstadter. This funding supplements FHSU support services and helps Tiger Comeback students to the finish line by providing scholarships that make that reentry goal even more attainable.

Take for example FHSU student Michelle Prewo. When life happened, Michelle made some important decisions – one being to stop out of her education at Fort Hays State. Stopping out does not mean dropping out – a reality that she took to heart. In her own words:

Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” I used to be overwhelmed at the thought of changing the world. I thought it seemed like a task that was way too big, so what was the point of trying? However, I have learned that by starting small with myself, I can make changes that will make me a better person and that can create ripples of change which can then change the world. One change I need to make for myself is to complete my bachelor’s degree, which will empower me to continue to change the world.

After reviewing my transcript, I will have 9 credit hours to pass in order to obtain a Bachelor of General Studies degree with a business emphasis. I believe I can handle one class in each of the next three semesters to complete my degree.

While I do want to change the world, obtaining my degree would be more personal than that even. I have always felt slightly inferior because I didn’t finish my degree. It makes me feel like a quitter. I feel like a hypocrite when I try to teach my children not to quit. Finally finishing my degree would give me a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Also, I do worry about my ability to provide for my family since I don't have a degree. It would definitely give me a sense of peace knowing that if something happened in my current position, that my chances for other, good quality employment would be greatly enhanced by having a degree.

Please help me finish my education so that together, we can change the world.

I am so proud of FHSU for investing in our students throughout their lives and not ever giving up on their educational dreams. I am also very proud of Michelle, who will complete her degree next fall through reflection, resilience, and making a plan. Michelle will indeed change our world.