

## Educating through stewardship and service

As a state comprehensive university, FHSU has a responsibility to be a “steward of place,” a term coined by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in 2002 to describe the role of our public comprehensive colleges and universities. From AASCU:

“We are ‘stewards of place.’ We engage faculty, staff and students with the communities and regions we serve – helping to advance public education, economic development and the quality of life for all with whom we live and who support our work. We affirm that America’s promise extends not only to those who come to the campus but to all our neighbors.

Serving as a steward of place is a responsibility Fort Hays State University has always fully embraced and at which it has excelled. Serving the needs of our community, broadly defined, is ingrained in our DNA. In fact, as I started out writing this column, I quickly realized that we are so good at stewarding our community that I had enough information to fill an entire newspaper!

But, in the spirit of brevity, let me highlight some of our key efforts in civic service and leadership, starting with an institution dedicated to the idea of citizenship.

FHSU’s Center for Civic Leadership endorses the view that higher education has a responsibility to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens, and that colleges and universities have a responsibility to make a positive and direct impact in their communities.

The Center’s four programs – The American Democracy Project; the Global Leadership Project; Tigers in Service; and the Women’s Leadership Project – are all designed to develop civic leadership skills. Two I want to focus on here are Tigers in Service and the Women’s Leadership Project.

Tigers in Service is a student operated program that acts as a clearinghouse for college students who want to volunteer and participate in community service activities. Over the last several years, student volunteers have impacted the Hays community in numerous ways: organizing food drives for local pantries; providing assistance to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of the area; tutoring at local elementary schools; and working directly with residents of local retirement homes.

The Women’s Leadership Project creates events and opportunities that are designed to empower, inspire and educate women to overcome barriers they face in today’s society.

Whether it’s standing against victim-blaming, raising awareness about the gender pay gap, talking about the importance of consent or encouraging women to register to vote, students and community members have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and stand up against the misconceptions and labels that are often seen before their voices are heard.

Through this, the Women’s Leadership Project helps build on the talents and skills that women naturally possess and empower them to seek leadership positions and opportunities, then go out into the world – fearless – and speak with the confidence they need to make a difference in this world.

Another agency, the Docking Institute of Public Affairs, began in the mid-1980s as the Institute of Public Affairs. In the beginning it was involved in the birth of the Ellis County Coalition for Economic Development (now Grow Hays). It was also involved, in its early stages, in the effort to find a replacement industry for Baxter-Travenol, a major manufacturer of medical supplies that closed its Hays production plant. That threw hundreds of people out of work in Hays and the surrounding area and left empty the large facility currently occupied by Enersys.

A \$115,000 state legislative grant was key in enabling the Institute to fully develop its strategic planning expertise to assist cities, counties and banks in planning for the future. The institute still provides those services to communities and non-profits in the region. Docking also provides social science research services to many communities in the state and region. Institute staff provides moderators for Smoky Hill Public Television's "The Kansas Legislature" show each year.

A major public service provided by the Docking Institute is the Kansas Speaks survey conducted each year, which employs professional survey research methods to gather and assess the opinions of Kansans from across the state. No other entity in the state provides this service.

This is just a small sampling, in just one area, of the impact Fort Hays State has had on our students, community and state. I look forward to sharing additional information on our stewardship efforts around art and culture; business and entrepreneurship; community, health and social services, special programs in teacher preparation along with other wonderful examples in future columns.

I am so proud of FHSU and the multitude of ways in which we focus our energies to "advance public education, economic development, and the quality of life" for our neighbors. Our desire to care for others extends beyond the campus and Western Kansas – it is how we do our best to empower the world to greater success.