

Realized potential meets success in New York

Brandon Penny is the epitome of how at Fort Hays State University we unlock untapped potential – just ask our Art and Design Department Chair Karrie Simpson Voth. Soon after graduation in 2013, Brandon, a graphic design major from Burlington, Colo., decided to pick-up and move to New York City.

New York City? Yes – and with no job. Karrie said she was terrified for him and thought New York would “eat him up.”

But she was wrong, because she and others had prepared him to succeed by seeing his potential and inspiring him to live up to it.

Brandon will tell you that earning his degree in graphic design was the smartest decision of his career. He describes the experience as “the most intensive and thorough program I have ever completed.” He also says that he welcomed the challenge. “Some of my happiest memories come from late nights spent in Rarick Hall with the most creative people I’ve ever met. It was there I gained my drive and skill set.”

The funny thing about unlocking potential is that although the drive always comes from within the student, it is still about relationships. Most importantly, it is about helping students discover and refine *their* talents and passions. The student comes first, not the major. It is about listening, learning, and holding up a metaphorical mirror. It is about really seeing each unique Fort Hays State student. The process can come from one person or many (professors, peers, staff). It can come from assignments and campus involvement and be amplified by experiences both on and off campus (internships, community service, churches).

Brandon describes his unlocking:

“I made countless lifelong friends in my general education courses and truly learned from professors because they cared about the material and my success. My freshman year I had a scholarship and was Victor E. Tiger! I was also an active member in theatre at Felten-Start, performing on stage and designing the posters and programs for each show. I wasn’t just a number; I was a student that mattered with a name and a story. I am now a well-rounded person that exceeds standards and qualifications and can withstand any obstacles that come my way.”

Not only can Brandon withstand obstacles, his self-reliance and talent proved unstoppable – even in New York. With a larger-than-life personality, confidence in his design skills and an outstanding portfolio, Brandon networked his way into the New York design scene by freelancing with The Society of Publication Designers. Shortly thereafter, he landed the first-ever design internship with Billboard Magazine and was later recruited to work in the design and photo departments at People Magazine.

Brandon credits many for his metamorphosis – especially Karrie. She is very invested in the lives of her students and cares deeply about each student with whom she works – their dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Brandon and Karrie continue to keep in touch. Fun fact: Every year, Brandon sends Karrie a personalized video of him singing Happy Birthday as well as a Happy Mother’s Day text.

There is so much I love about Brandon’s story: the friendships he developed here; his on-campus involvement; the joy he brought others, whether through creating late night memories in Rarick Hall or through his interactions as Victor E. Tiger and the many roles played in Felten-Start Theatre; and especially the young professional he became. Today, he is a member of the creative

team as a graphic designer for Saks Fifth Avenue in New York. An icon of style and luxury, Saks is a legendary company with a rich history that employs world-class adventurers, like Brandon Penny, who explore uncharted territory, challenge convention and work with imagination and fun.

And it all started at Fort Hays State.

Brandon says that ultimately, what he loved about his time at Fort Hays State is that after graduation, he walked away with an amazing portfolio of work and something to look forward to: A bright future. That is what it means to unlock untapped potential, and it is my hope and dream for every student.