

## Truly, grit is a factor here

My email includes a PassItOn.com quote of the day. Some days I click through them, often with a smile, but not a lot of thought. Other times I ponder them a bit more. One that immediately caught my full attention was this one about grit, which is a key characteristic of Fort Hays State University: “Grit is not just a simple elbow-grease term for rugged persistence. It is often an invisible display of endurance that lets you stay in an uncomfortable place, work hard to improve upon a given interest and do it again and again.”

Typically when I hear that term, I immediately think of our amazing student athletes and how this quality is often on display as they fight hard to perfect their performances and bring home the trophy for their alma mater. But this particular definition got me thinking about the every-day kind of grit that we often don't notice.

Such as: the student who goes to the tutoring center over and over and over again to master the content of a difficult class; the faculty member who endures the painstaking repetition of re-doing and re-evaluating and rewriting trial after trial on a research project; or the software technician who pores over lines of code for hours on end to find the answer to “Why isn't X working?”

I also found grit alive and well in another place where it is often overlooked – our music and theatre program. I have been enthralled by the students this year in “Mama Mia,” “Barefoot in the Park” and “The Marriage of Figaro.” Our students' performances have captivated me with how effortless they make it look to bring characters to life before our very eyes. I knew it took time to learn their lines, but what really surprised me is how much grit is needed for them to deliver their characters.

I discovered this when I had the opportunity to visit with the charming Danni Dickerson, a junior music education major from Colorado. Danni played a leading role in all three productions this year – a challenge in itself. In fact, she often had to leave early from “Figaro” rehearsals to join the cast rehearsing “Barefoot in the Park.” I assumed she had been acting for a very long time.

Not true. In fact, she had not participated in theatre at all until she came to Fort Hays State. That is one thing I love about Fort Hays – how our environment encourages students to discover new talents and try new things.

Danni told me that when she began her college journey, she had her heart set on two things: going to a particular name-brand institution and being an orthodontist. She had dreamed about that university since she was a child, but as the college decision approached she became concerned about the cost and decided to tour Fort Hays State. That tour sealed the deal – she immediately knew she had found her college home.

Then, at pre-enrollment, she learned about the auditions for music scholarships. Since she was trying to drive down the cost of college, she decided to audition. She described the experience as very scary as well as highly successful. From that initial audition experience of “feeling the fear and doing it anyway” she gained a music scholarship, a wonderful group of friends, an extremely encouraging and nurturing faculty – and a new major. She said she was never so clear on her life's passion. She will teach children to sing, but more importantly she will use music to inspire their confidence, encourage them to try new things, and to embrace fear so they can take hold of incredible opportunities – just as she has done.

As I sat listening to Danni talk about her college life, I quickly realized I was listening to someone who possessed a lot of grit. She talked about terrifying auditions, taking risks, staying focused, and learning not to be so hard on herself. She knew that performing the lead role in the “Marriage of Figaro” opera was going to be a big challenge, but she was willing to put in her time and shift other priorities to perform well. She was learning and growing.

One of the biggest lessons she has learned is that she can do a lot more than she gives herself credit for. She discovered that sometimes you just have to get out of your own way – a comment that really resonated with me!

The “invisible display of endurance that lets you stay in an uncomfortable place, work hard to improve upon a given interest and do it again and again.” You cannot simply talk about being gritty. You have to live it. Danni Dickerson’s FHSU story definitely portrays grit.

Her future students will experience a dynamic, caring music teacher, and I am confident she will encourage their hearts and unleash new opportunities for each of them.