

Knowing their subjects is only a starting point for great faculty

What pure joy it is to shake the hand of every student who crosses that commencement stage! Did you know I preside over five ceremonies: the Kansas Academy of Mathematics and Science Completion Ceremony, two FHSU ceremonies in Hays, one at Sias International University in Xinzheng, China, and a final ceremony at Shenyang Normal University in Shenyang, China. That is several thousand handshakes!

These newly conferred academic degrees offer our most recent alumni opportunities for new beginnings. These new beginnings are so full of promise and hope. And it was with both pride and confidence that I conferred degrees.

The pride comes from valuing the hard work and the many accomplishments of our students. Confidence emanates from the knowledge that FHSU is truly a student-centered institution. Yet as hard as our students work, it is often the faculty and staff, who care so deeply about our students, who drive that effort. Our faculty and staff inspire the dreams of our students, help them discover their talents, and fuel their passion to complete this segment of their life's journey.

According to research by Gallup Education, a deep ethic of care is correlated with long-term career and life success. Gallup's research indicates that graduates who strongly agree they had the following six experiences as students performed better on every measure of long-term success compared with graduates who did not share these experiences:

1. A professor who made them excited about learning
2. Professors who cared about them as individuals
3. A mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams
4. Worked on a long-term project
5. Had a job or internship where they applied what they were learning
6. Were extremely involved in cocurricular activities

Bingo! These "Big Six" serve at the center of who we are as a community. Here are just a few stories students have shared with me:

A professor who made you truly excited about learning:

Dr. Lexey Bartlett has been an incredibly inspiring and encouraging professor and mentor to me. She has challenged and pushed me to work harder in various classes I've had with her. As the director of the Writing Center, she has always been available and taken the time to listen to my worries and questions about interviews and class projects and my future and all sorts of things. She has truly inspired and encouraged me every day.

– Alexis-Athena Wyatt, Colorado Springs, Colorado, senior majoring in English

A professor who cared about them as persons:

The professors are amazing at FHSU and I am not saying this just to flatter. Their doors are always open for you to visit them in their office and if you can't reach them physically, you can always send an email or call and they respond as soon as possible. They have made the academic life less overwhelming especially been an international student, coming from a different educational system.

– Precious Ohanson, Lagos, Nigeria, majoring in nursing

A mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams:

Professor Angie Howard in the Psychology Department has been such a help to me this semester. On top of her feedback that helped me develop my thinking and plans for my future career as a high school counselor. She also looked over a job listing for me and gave me so many great tips, advice, things to research, and possible interview questions to prepare for.

– Courtney Morgan, Dallas, Texas, senior majoring in psychology

Worked on a long-term project:

Being a virtual student, I always longed for more interactions with my peers, and that desire was answered this year. As a scholar in the FHSU Leadership Department's VALUE Program, I met weekly with six other students as we gained advanced leadership abilities through the completion of a project. My project saw me conducting research on undergraduate students working to complete group projects, and Dr. Brent Goertzen spent a great amount of time mentoring me on this project.

– **Jonathan Jett, Prattville, Alabama, senior majoring in organizational leadership**

Had a job or internship where they applied what they were learning:

Last summer, I had the opportunity to work as a grain merchandising intern for Bartlett Grain Co. I was able to apply my base understanding of the commodity markets, basis, market spreads, and critical thinking abilities to work within the agricultural industry. I gained valuable insights into this industry and was very grateful for the opportunity to apply what I was learning in the classroom to real world situations.

– **Rachel Anliker Kropp, Garden City senior majoring in finance**

Were extremely involved in co-curricular activities:

I was very involved in various work experience from Student Support Services to Admissions. I held various leadership roles including serving on a regional board of directors and president of the National Residence Hall Honorary. All of this experience lead me to find the field of student affairs and wanting to pursue it as a career.

– **Jessica Conklin, Green Bay, Wis., senior majoring in higher education student affairs**

As I look out at the commencement audiences, it is more than symbolic for me to see the faculty and staff seated among the graduates, because it is through their direct efforts that our students experience the “Big Six.” And it is why FHSU delivers more than a degree – it provides a passport so that our students thrive, not only in college, but also in their careers and lives.