

Honoring and serving our student veterans

Veterans Day is quickly approaching, a day for honoring and thanking all of those who have served and sacrificed for our country, in war or peace. For me, this is a very personal day. I set aside time to think about all of our veterans, but especially for the selfless service of my brother Todd, who served in the Coast Guard from high school through retirement. He passed in 2017 from brain cancer. Todd's service to our country defined him and fueled a sense of patriotism I only experienced through him. I am so proud of how he lived his life and served our country.

I am also very grateful for the strong military focus of Fort Hays State University. We not only serve members of every branch of the military, but through the efforts of Dr. Seth Kastle, (retired Army Reserve) of our faculty, and Kelsi Broadway, a Navy veteran and a member of the university staff, we have a clear understanding of the needs and responsibilities of our men and women in uniform. In fact, we have been named a Top Military-Friendly University for both our undergraduate and graduate programs.

A great example of our exemplary military-friendly initiatives is our Associate of Applied Science in Technology and Leadership, with an emphasis in leadership studies. This is the only degree of its kind specifically developed for service members. Developed in partnership with the U.S. Army and the Kansas Board of Regents Credit for Military Alignment initiative, FHSU offers enough course credit for training and experience that service members may only be required to take as few as eight classes to earn this degree.

In one year, service members can earn both an associate's degree and simultaneously a Certificate in Leadership Studies. Once completed, a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership can be earned in two additional years, and a Master of Professional Studies with a concentration in leadership studies in a fourth year. This program provides the opportunity for our service members to earn four credentials in four years!

As a student-focused university, we are always thinking about ways to be more effective in supporting our students. The Green Zone Initiative is an excellent example. This faculty and staff professional development program educates participants about the challenges and at-risk behaviors of student veterans. Our Military Focus Committee works to improve the military-connected student experience at FHSU by seeking out new ways to support the unique needs of this student population. In all aspects of student life, from financial support services to counseling and mentoring, the Military Focus Committee strives to enrich the student experience for the FHSU military-connected community.

Additionally, our military-friendly policies protect enrolled students from financial hardship should they be required to deploy or are activated. We are pioneers in using the Kansas Board of Regents Credit for Military Alignment Initiative, which increases the amount of military training and experience that directly translates to major-specific hours in many degree programs.

Our specialized staff are trained to assist with federal and state tuition assistance, VA benefits, and unofficial transcript analysis before students apply for admission. This promotes informed decision making and guides navigation through the admission, application, and degree processes. We also understand the sacrifices made by family members and offer services and support to meet their

educational needs. For more information about military student services please visit our web site: <https://www.fhsu.edu/military/index>.

We also have a very active Student Veterans Association. One of its top priorities is to fund scholarships for military students. The SVA also works to unite the military-connected students at FHSU and to provide support and camaraderie among its members.

Last month we opened a new office on campus for the Kansas Army National Guard. This office will provide members of the Fort Hays State community with information on the educational and professional benefits of enlisting in the Kansas National Guard.

Our care and commitment go deeper than just working with enrolled students. The Community Access Point, for example, is a partnership between FHSU and the Manhattan Area Veteran Center. This partnership allows any military-connected person within commutable distance from Hays to seek out free behavioral health, mental health, or marriage counseling without having to be a part of the VA system or affiliated with FHSU.

Of course, as a leader in distance education, our strong online programming allows service members to take classes anywhere with an internet connection. In fact, I once took a call from a student in the Navy calling me from a submarine off the coast of Japan!

I am looking forward to the Veterans Day celebration on campus in the Memorial Union's Sunset Atrium at 11:11 a.m. Monday, Nov. 11. The program will include student veteran speaker Joe Gunderson, a Hays graduate student. Taps will be played by university band member Abbey Hirsch, a senior from Abilene. Refreshments will be served.

I also urge you to think about other meaningful ways to express your gratitude to our veterans, including hanging a flag in your yard; adopting a military family for the holidays; thank veterans for their service – perhaps serve them a treat; ask a veteran about their time in their military; ask them to share with you the song that most takes them back; gather with friends and watch a patriotic movie; take flowers to a veteran's grave; or simply say a silent prayer for those who will spend their day serving all of us.

At Fort Hays State University, we don't simply enroll military students, we embrace them, learn from them, and serve them. My brother would be proud of our commitment to serve those who serve us and to help enrich their lives as they have enriched ours.