

Heart of Tiger: 2024 graduate Chelsea Kiefer and the power of FHSU Online

In the realms of history and academia, Chelsea Kiefer stands out as a beacon of dedication and inspiration. The Baltimore-born, North Carolina resident is an avid history enthusiast and the first-ever FHSU Online student to win the Torch Award. The Torch Award is presented each year to a few special students in recognition of their academic excellence and dedicated service to student, civic, or professional organizations.

Chelsea's academic journey is a testament to her tenacity. She dropped out of high school in the 10th grade, and then later decided to earn her GED. She then went to work, but her passion for history has always been a living, breathing vocation that drove her to soar through her studies at Fort Hays State University with a remarkable 3.99 GPA.

Chelsea moved to Raleigh from Augusta, GA, in 2020 so that her husband Tim could embark on his Ph.D. journey in Nuclear Engineering at North Carolina State University. Chelsea seized the opportunity afforded by the move to reshape her own professional future.

"It was the perfect timing," says Chelsea, reflecting on her decision to leave her job as a quality assurance specialist for a tax software company and pursue a career that aligned with her love for history and community engagement.

FHSU Online offered the flexibility she required, with an affordable and fully accredited history program tailored to accommodate her busy life. Her academic journey at FHSU was just as much about leadership and contribution as it was about mastering her discipline.

Chelsea served as the secretary of the honorary society for history, Phi Alpha Theta, and the History Club. She earned scholarships from the Honor Society and served as an online student representative for the Holocaust Remembrance and Education Month planning committees.

Her leadership and passion for advancing the field of public history are evident in a body of work that has touched people in a variety of settings. Chelsea served as a Docent Volunteer at the North Carolina Museum of History and an intern in collections. She served as a grant writer through the Dane G. Hansen program, contributing 300 invaluable hours writing grants on behalf of the Hays Areas Children's Center.

Dr. Amber Nickell, assistant professor of history at FHSU, commends Chelsea's astounding breadth of publications, academic presentations, and public engagements – a portfolio that would be enviable for a Ph.D. graduate, let alone an undergraduate.

But numbers and titles cannot capture the essence of who Chelsea is – a lover of animals, a devoted wife to Tim, a friend to her three rescue dogs, an avid reader, gardener, baker, and an enthusiast for the simple joys of family hikes and nurturing of house plants.

Her desire to connect people with their heritage led to the creation of the FHSU History Discord in June 2021, which now thrives with over 130 members. This lively digital forum, developed under Chelsea's guidance, has become an indispensable resource for students and professors alike.

Chelsea's volunteer work reflects her multifaceted interests and commitments. She has worked tirelessly at the North Carolina Museum of History and transcribed historical documents for Denso.org, an organization that preserves stories of Japanese Americans held in World War II

internment camps. She has also worked with the National Park Service and devoted her time to The Produce Project, a group that provides fresh produce in her Raleigh community. In addition to her wide-ranging commitments, she still finds time to care for her three beloved rescue dogs and seek new adventures alongside her husband, Tim.

Her scholarly work has not only been admirable but prolific. She's presented original research at academic conferences and shared the findings from her papers as a guest on FHSU's Victor E. History Podcast. Her work has also been published in The Historians Magazine, and she's earned the praise of FSHU history professor Dr. Amber Nickell for sharing her research with public audiences via presentations, podcasts, and publications.

Today, Chelsea is not only an alumna with an undergraduate degree in history, a minor in sociology, and four certificates (global studies, grant writing, women's and gender studies, and cultural diversity studies) but also a shining example of lifelong learning. Soon, she will begin pursuing her master's degree in Public History at FHSU.

Her leadership extends to numerous roles, including history club, Phi Alpha Theta, and various committees at FHSU and beyond. Through initiatives like the Holocaust Education and Remembrance Committee, Chelsea contributes to vital cultural and educational dialogues, epitomizing the role of a student leader who transcends the online domain.

Chelsea embodies the spirit of the Torch Award—perseverance, excellence, and an unwavering commitment to her community's past and present. Through her academic achievements, leadership, and benevolence, she has indeed lit the way, not only for current students but for all those who believe in the transformational power of education.

Chelsea Kiefer's story is not merely one of scholarly triumph but of an unquenchable zest for knowledge and thoughtful community engagement, proving that every chapter in life presents a new opportunity for greatness.