

## **Professional excellence and caring hearts-the hallmarks of FHSU nursing**

When an altruistic heart is driven by the aspiration to assist others in achieving their full potential, a level of excellence beyond measure is attained. This is how I would portray our nursing department - a group of faculty and staff whose unwavering passion for supporting and caring for others never ceases to amaze me.

Success can be measured in several ways. One is through nursing licensure exam pass rates. Our May 2023 doctorate of nursing practice (DNP) graduates achieved a 100% pass rate for the Family Nurse Practitioner National Certification exam, the same pass rate we received in 2022. The national average for this exam was 74% in 2022. In November, we hosted the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) to renew accreditation for the DNP program, and we were approved for ten years - the lengthiest renewal period possible.

We are also thrilled to have been selected for a federal grant of over \$2.5 million over the next four years. It will provide stipends for students who plan to work in rural western Kansas. This grant also covers tuition, books, and travel expenses and provides an iPad loaded with nearly \$500 of medical software for our DNP students. Our commitment to advancing healthcare in rural western Kansas remains steadfast.

While these facts and figures are noteworthy, the true victories lie in the impact stories of our graduates. Taylor Ziegler is a prime example of this. Taylor graduated from FHSU with both her undergraduate and graduate degrees and now serves as Vice President of Nursing at Camber Children's Mental Health, where she oversees nursing and program services for Camber's children's psychiatric hospitals and residential treatment facilities.

"I appreciate how Fort Hays teaches students about diverse and rural populations and how to serve them best as a provider. Camber continues to serve children in crisis across our three sites in Kansas and enjoys having FHSU nursing students for their clinical in mental health," shared Taylor.

Through her service as an engaged citizen leader on our BSN and DNP advisory boards, Taylor perfectly embodies our university's mission. She is an outstanding advocate for advancing the quality of nursing and mental health care in western Kansas.

In May, we graduated our largest bachelor of science class ever. Our National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) pass rate for the last two years combined is 95%. In 2022 our pass rate was 93%, a remarkable achievement compared to the national average of just under 80%. Our success has led to an opportunity to expand our impact, with our faculty seeking approval from the State Board of Nursing in Topeka to raise our admission quota from 65 to 90. The request was approved. This will allow us to prepare even more students for rewarding careers in nursing.

I am particularly impressed by how the department collaborates with Hays Medical Center (HMC). Recently, HMC created a paid summer internship that allows students who plan to work at HMC following graduation to receive a stipend for tuition and their time spent working as

interns. Thank you, HaysMed and FHSU nursing faculty, for being strong partners and looking out for our students.

Our faculty understands that college is about much more than classrooms and exams – it's also a time to gain leadership experiences, build confidence, and make a difference. Our nursing students are fully engaged in university life, participating in various co-curricular activities, including intercollegiate and intramural athletics, the arts, and student organizations like student government and professional organizations like the Fort Hays Association of Nursing Students, Nursing Christian Fellowship, and Sigma Theta Tau, the international honor society of nursing.

Nursing student Emma Swint's decision to join a student organization helped her build confidence. It also resulted in her making courageous decisions that delivered life-giving results. As a member of the Fort Hays Association of Nursing Students, Emma was asked to consider swabbing her cheek for bone marrow and stem cell donation for the Gift of Life Program. Shortly after that experience, she was notified she was a match for two sisters, one aged five and the other six months, suffering from a type of leukemia.

Emma was sent to Salina in March to begin the process with blood draws to ensure she was the perfect match. In June, Emma received a phone call from the Gift of Life program. She was indeed the perfect match – having one donor match two individuals was extraordinary. She then flew down to Boca Raton, Florida, to give the gift of life to these girls – after a seven-hour, successful transplant process.

I am immensely proud of our faculty members who strive to make their courses and student learning experiences the best possible. Dr. Jenny Manry, our exemplary nursing department chair, shared that our recent BSN curriculum change increased the time students spend in clinical and rural rotations. The added hours in the capstone experience will increase student confidence and knowledge regarding patient care, better preparing them to be nurses immediately after graduation. I deeply admire and am grateful for Jenny's vision and passion for serving rural communities.

Our faculty constantly create great experiences and opportunities for our students and model their belief in continuing education and stackable professional credentials. We are very proud of several faculty members who have completed their doctoral degrees over the last two years - Michelle VanderWege, Bonnie Landgraf, and Katie Gabel each received their DNP degrees, and Kelly Cole received her Ed.D degree.

Our department of nursing is truly exceptional. Their commitment to providing high-quality education and training to their students is evident in the success of their graduates. The department's faculty and staff are dedicated to supporting their students in every way possible, from providing hands-on clinical experience to offering mentorship and guidance throughout their academic journey. With state-of-the-art facilities and cutting-edge technology, the department is at the forefront of nursing education. It's no wonder graduates of this program are highly sought after by employers and go on to make significant contributions to the healthcare field. I couldn't be prouder.