

Heart of a Tiger: Bringing history to life

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - At Fort Hays State University, our resolve to outlast and achieve is as firm and steady as our century-old limestone buildings. A great example of this resolve is our history department. Our history program is innovative, student-centered, and growing.

History students delve into the depths of time, grappling with the complexities of the human experience while surrounded by faculty who are always willing to go the extra mile to see students learn, grow, and succeed. With an unwavering dedication to research, critical analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches, our history faculty cultivate a vibrant academic experience.

I know this because I am a collector of student stories. I am often amazed at how frequently I hear from students about how their history classes have positively impacted their lives. At the center of all of these stories are the faculty – their support, encouragement, innovation, and especially how faculty challenge students to work hard and dig deeper.

One of those professors is Hollie Marquess. Hollie, a first-generation college student, grew up in Plainville, Kansas. As a kid, she loved to talk about history with her dad. He taught her to question everything, which turned out to be a very beneficial skill for a future historian.

After high school, she enrolled at FHSU, but not initially as a history major. She was hooked by a lecture on the [Triangle Shirtwaist Factory](#) fire in her “US History Since 1877” class. Hollie changed her major to history and completed both a bachelor's and master's degree. After she completed her master's degree, she started teaching online and returned to teach on campus in 2016.

“Rarick and the history program feel like home to me. In one capacity or another, I have been in Rarick for over 20 years,” Hollie shared.

Hollie is also the host of the Victor E. History podcast. The podcast series features about eight episodes per semester. On the podcast, she talks with students about their original research. Students need to have written an excellent research paper to be considered for the podcast, and this experience helps them to think about research in a way that is publicly accessible outside of academia. This is an essential skill for them to learn.

The topics are all fascinating, and the students do a great job. There are also episodes featuring notable alums. For example, this season, season four, Chris Dinkel, the 2023 recipient of the Young Alumni Award, is featured. Chris discusses his experience in our history program, studying for the LSAT, Columbia law, and his case that recently went to the Supreme Court. Season four will also include episodes on women in aviation, childless women in the 19th century, famine and disease in Ireland, and more!

Anyone can listen to the podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Amazon Music or go to <https://victorehistory.com/> to subscribe and to get notifications when new episodes are available. Season four features attacks planned on women in aviation, childless women in the 19th century, famine and disease in Ireland, and more!

The Victor E. History podcast began as a conversation between Professor Marquess and FHSU students in the History Club/Phi Alpha Theta. They talked about how she uses podcasts in the classroom, and this sparked her idea to create her own. After some searching, Hollie learned that history departments don't tend to host podcasts; if they do, the content typically focuses on professors talking about their historical interests. The student-centered Hollie had a different vision.

"I wanted Victor E. History to highlight student research and our alumni doing incredible work," Hollie said. "One of the things that my department does best is that we are very involved with our students both online and on-campus. The popular perception of historians is that we are dusty curmudgeons who are only interested in our research. That couldn't be further from the truth in our department."

Hollie shared that she and her faculty colleagues love getting to know the students and helping them reach their goals. She is proud of the fact that everyone in the department mentors the students throughout their time at FHSU and that mentorship doesn't stop at graduation. They stay in contact with recent alumni and continue to mentor them as they begin new careers.

FHSU history faculty are also engaged in the larger community. They believe it is essential to expand public knowledge about historical topics.

"One of my proudest moments at FHSU, aside from pride in my students' work, was bringing Holocaust survivor Gene Klein to campus in 2017. Now, we have Holocaust Remembrance and Education programming every April on campus and in the Hays community," Hollie said.

Last spring, Hollie joined her colleague Dr. Amber Nickell on a faculty-led study abroad trip to Poland. While in Poland, the students learned about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Hollie believes that it was an incredible experience for all of them.

"Watching our students explore places they've only ever read about and sharing profound learning experiences with them is worth all the work that goes into a study abroad class," Hollie said.

This dynamic duo is making plans now to lead study-abroad classes in France, Germany, and Denmark over the next few years.

Hollie and Amber are currently working with senior history major Sarah Keiss on an exciting project.

"Sarah is someone whom I met when she came to do a college visit, and I have seen so much growth in her confidence since she's been in our program," Hollie said. "Last year, during our Holocaust Remembrance and Education Events, Stephen Naron of Yale University's Fortunoff Archives visited Forsyth and was blown away by the exhibit that Sarah had created at her student job. That night, she and Stephen were chatting with Dr. Amber Nickell about how amazing Sarah is and how our trip to Poland with students, including Sarah, helped shape their future careers."

The three colleagues decided to embark on a project that utilizes the Fortunoff Archives since Forsyth is an access site for them. They decided to focus on using forty-six oral history

testimonies of Holocaust survivors who settled in the Kansas City area. They are now mapping the movements of these survivors from birth to death and exploring geographic questions that they hope will reveal new knowledge on the Midwest as a place Holocaust survivors settled post-war. They plan to present this work in the spring and will publish the project and a co-written article. They hope the project will be helpful for area teachers in their classrooms.

Professor Hollie Marquess has so many beautiful stories to share about her students. And as I can attest, her students have many stories about Hollie's impact on them. She is an exceptional educator who authentically embraces our culture of care, cultivates intentional relationships, encourages student empowerment, builds self-confidence, fosters critical thinking, creates a nurturing learning environment, and provides an abundance of opportunities to maximize student growth and learning, and by doing so, develops generations primed for success.

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