

Newcomers adding energy to FHSU

Fort Hays State University exists to improve lives. Every day, I witness and experience our relentless focus on excellence and the unwavering resilience of my Fort Hays State colleagues. We work hard at supporting our students, faculty, and staff. We are responsible to one another and for one another. Together we build a better world.

By the time this *Heart of the Tiger* column is published, we will have welcomed our faculty, staff, and students back to campus. It is my pleasure to introduce to the community the newest members of our senior leadership team: Dr. Angela Pool-Funai, dean of the Graduate School, and Dr. Dan Blankenship, interim dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS).

Angela, a native of Houston, Texas, relocated to Hays from the high desert of southern Utah. Bryce Canyon National Park, by the way, is one of her favorite locales on the planet. I am adding that to my travel wish list.

Angela is a nearly empty-nester mom of five boys. She shared with me that she has gone from feeding an army to needing to relearn how to grocery shop for much smaller portions.

Angela and I share a love for boxing. Her other hobbies, I learned, are much more ambitious than mine. She is restoring a 1988 Ford Thunderbird that she affectionately refers to as her midlife crisis project. "I like working with my hands," she said. "There are few things more gratifying to me than repairing something myself."

Angela loves the outdoors. She can be seen biking around Ellis and enjoys taking her canoe out to explore the lakes and reservoirs in the area. She says that spending time on the water helps her decompress both mentally and physically.

A fun story Angela shared with me is that her first book was on ethics in fiscal administration (managing public resources in an ethical manner). The best compliment she received came from a student who told her that he expected to hate the book. Instead, he not only enjoyed reading it, he asked her to autograph his copy.

Angela comes from a non-traditional academic background, in that she had many years of experience as a staff member before joining the faculty. The role of Graduate School Dean connects both paths of her career by allowing her to work across disciplines and with all areas of the university. I loved and appreciated this about her background as well as her positive, creative, high energy.

Look for Angela at a Tiger football game as she is "pumped" for our first home game – as am I! She is also especially excited about a new virtual Lunch & Learn series that the Graduate School is launching to stay engaged with all of our graduate students, both on campus and online. I love this.

"The people I have met at FHSU made me feel at home before I even stepped foot on campus. I'm thrilled to be part of Tiger Nation!" Angela shared. We are excited about her talents and very optimistic how her efforts will benefit our students and our university.

When long-standing and beloved dean, Paul Faber, retired after 38 years of dedicated service to FHSU, Dr. Jill Arensdorf, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, wisely decided to appoint an interim dean of the college for one year. Dr. Blankenship was a perfect match to fill that role. He serves a special niche in higher education, providing strategic leadership for universities wanting to keep an institution moving forward while taking a more thoughtful approach in transitioning leadership.

Dan came to Fort Hays State after serving for three years at Fort Valley State University in Georgia as dean of the College of Agriculture, then as vice provost for Academic Affairs and Director of Graduate Studies. He is very talented in keeping a university moving forward while creating processes for a successful transition for the leader selected to follow him. I feel very fortunate to have him on our team this year.

Fun facts about Dan include that he is a licensed pilot (for about 20 years), has flown various aircraft, and currently owns a Mooney aircraft.

Dan's academic credentials include achieving faculty rank of professor of biology as well as earning tenure three times at three different institutions. He has been involved in liberal arts education most of his academic career and has delivered a keynote address to the faculty of Beijing Normal University in China and published in proceedings in Hong Kong, for example, on the application of a liberal arts education.

What I really love about Dan is that he is very committed to student access and success. He has an academic background as a faculty member and 20-plus years in administration, demonstrating that commitment through retention and graduation initiatives.

I asked Dan about his hopes for this academic year. "I'd like to see that the CAHSS becomes known for its initiative, creativity, and innovation – leading to better access by students to our programs and to be able to highlight the strengths of our programs," he said. "I also would like us to find ways to better influence thought processes and thinking skills to help our constituents and students more critically analyze the world around us."

I am so excited to welcome our newest senior leaders, Angela and Dan, to Fort Hays State as well as to our wonderful Ellis County neighborhood. Celebrating and sharing some of the newest members of Tiger Nation brings me great joy!

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