

Celebrating success to kick off new school year

I love the start of a new academic year. Taking time to get to know our newest community members and reunite with those we have not been in daily summer contact is pure joy. I especially enjoy celebrating the success of our community through our accolades video and awards ceremony.

The President's Award is Fort Hays State University's highest honor, given by the president for substantial contributions to the university through professional and personal achievements. It is not given often – last presented in 2014. This fall I presented the award to our Teaching Innovation and Learning Technologies (TILT) Department.

In just three short weeks, TILT helped overhaul the entire China program to deliver online learning following the COVID-19 shutdown in early spring 2020. It even created tutorials for the students in Mandarin. Following its efforts in China, the team worked tirelessly to create and update its website to provide faculty with detailed information and helpful links when campus classes transitioned to all online courses.

Noting that online students needed a deeper connection, TILT oversaw the implementation of the Tiger-2-Tiger Student Support Platform. In addition to its pandemic response, TILT continued to meet with faculty to develop new courses for programs and incorporated new ideas from the pandemic into the fall 2021 professional development session. They are always scanning and implementing cutting-edge technologies to improve teaching and learning.

The President's Distinguished Scholar Award was first conferred in 1989. Nominees for this honor are evaluated by the analysis of their performance in the categories of scholarship, service, and instruction. Significant levels of performance must be demonstrated in service and instruction, with the primary focus of this award based on research/creative activities.

Dr. Hendratta Ali received the 2021 President's Distinguished Scholar Award. Hendratta is an accomplished educator and research scholar in the field of geoscience. She has 25 peer-reviewed publications, a book chapter, over 100 refereed abstracts presented, and is recognized nationally and internationally. Recently, she secured grants totaling more than \$500,000, including two from the National Science Foundation and Geoscientist Without Borders. Receiving these awards attests to her research skills, technical expertise, and commitment to education and service.

The Faculty Member-of-the-Year Award is selected from the past year's recipients of faculty awards for teaching, research/scholarly activity, and service. Dr. April Park was selected as the recipient of this award because she defines excellence in scholarly activity. She is passionate about her research and working with students.

One of April's former students sums up her professor's commitment with this statement, "Her support and guidance shaped me into the researcher, advisor, and graduate student I am today." April's impact on her students continues to enhance their learning experience and reflects her goal to be the best professor, researcher, mentor, and colleague possible.

Brooke Mann received the John Heinrichs Outstanding Research Mentor Award for her commitment to foster undergraduate research. Brooke has shown outstanding mentorship by

supporting her students throughout the research process. She is committed to the growth and learning of these individuals by making it a priority to oversee and assist in preparing their materials for presentations and conferences. She is open to student ideas and broadening her research interests to enhance the experience for all of our students. These qualities demonstrate her caring demeanor and how deserving she is to receive this award. One student exemplifies this with the statement, "I feel very fortunate that I was able to work with her throughout my undergraduate years, and I know I am a better researcher because of it."

Our awards also honored the Department of Computer Science with the Advancing Assessment Award and our Department of Leadership Studies with the Closing the Loop Assessment Award. Both of these departments have made great strides in improving teaching and learning.

Our accolades video highlighted several accomplishments made by our faculty and staff over the summer. Dr. Seth Kastle received the 2020 Veterans Knowledge Community Ally and Advocate Award from the National Association of Student Affairs Personnel Administrators. Dr. Patti Griffin was appointed to the advisory board and professional development committee of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. Dr. Whitney Whitaker served as a professional representative and program chair for the Southwestern Psychological Association.

Grants received over the summer – totaling more than \$190,000 – included two projects funded by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism. One was awarded to Dr. Bill Starks and the other to graduate student Chloe Million. The National Science Foundation provided funds to Dr. Paul Adams and Earl Legleiter, while a gift from the Hays Masonic Lodge was used to purchase software for the FHSU Virtual Literacy Institute. Dr. Jenny Manry received a grant for more than \$150,000 from the Kansas Board of Regents Kansas Nursing Initiative Grant program.

Some of our faculty spent their summers publishing textbooks. Dr. Janet Stramel wrote two textbooks: *Early Childhood Mathematics Methods and Science and Mathematics Planning: Lessons of Equity Unit*. Heather Musil published *Cliff Notes of Writing an IEP*. Sue Boldra wrote an elementary social studies methods book, while Mandy Kern, a staff member at our Kansas Wetlands Education Center, authored a children's book, "Ava: A Year of Adventure in the Life of an American Avocet." Several faculty were also recognized for articles published.

I love starting each new school year celebrating the accomplishments of my colleagues. They truly inspire me. I am proud of the work they are doing and especially the impact they make on our students, professions, community, and the world. Indeed, our lives are improved through their devotion to their work.

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