

## **FHSU admissions staff still going the extra mile**

There are many unsung heroes on our Fort Hays State University campus. One group that fits this description is our admissions staff. On the surface, their jobs look like a lot of fun – meeting prospective Tigers and their families, sharing their love of FHSU, helping them complete all the right paperwork, and then welcoming each student to campus with great joy and enthusiasm. They get to dress in Fort Hays State gear EVERY day and connect with so many people in meaningful ways. They inspire and encourage the hearts of many who feel college is a big scary step. In a way, they are the big sisters and brothers of every on-campus student.

What we often fail to think about is exactly how complex, critical, and time-demanding their jobs are. Our staff really need to “be on” – and authentically on – all of the time. The position demands the ability to relate to diverse student populations and their family members while exhibiting a high level of enthusiasm and creativity.

However, they also need more than finely honed people skills. They manage a lot of paperwork and need to understand university policies and processes, not to mention how to navigate often overwhelming federal financial aid forms. They prioritize complex travel and event schedules, which often require extensive overnight, evening, and weekend work. After a long day of meeting students and their families, the administrative work begins. There are records to update, telephone calls to make, social media posts to draft, and relentless follow-up as each counselor continues to check-in with every student to ensure questions are answered and enthusiasm is built.

Two jobs on a college campus have built-in areas of accountability that are both data-driven and demanding. While it’s not only about the numbers for coaches and admissions staffers, coaches are evaluated on winning and admissions professionals must get students to become Tigers. At the end of the day, I know the desire to win is in the DNA of all of our coaches, and I know how much our admissions team cares about meeting institutional enrollment goals; it is, indeed, a heavy weight to bear for both.

Of course, student recruitment work requires a lot of support from the faculty who will teach and advise the new students, as well as from professional staff who will process financial aid and housing requests, help our new Tigers get acclimated to campus, and fulfill many other support service roles. These village-like efforts reinforce and supplement the work of the admissions staff. Our strong university-wide ethic of care also helps – a lot.

The pandemic has significantly changed how we interact with one another, and I got to wondering about its impact on the daily routines of our admissions staff. Like many of us, our admissions colleagues took to the Internet to communicate and develop strong personal relationships. Personal zoom sessions are becoming standard. Our admissions staff also attends virtual college fairs where they deliver short, powerful presentations to hundreds of students across the state simultaneously. To stand out in this media requires a whole different skill set.

Although some recruiters have placed their cars in park, the FHSU Tiger team is still making high school visits whenever they can. Our admissions staff don masks when visiting the schools and, not surprisingly, are thoughtful in adhering to social distancing measures, personal wellness checks, and sometimes temperature checks. In some cases, the in-class meetings

have been replaced with socially distanced presentations in the high school gym – which demands our team to be even more creative and personable.

According to our admissions team, so far, we are experiencing larger crowds and more interest in FHSU. One creative high school counselor found our visit to be the perfect opportunity to gather the entire school, from freshmen to seniors, to listen to our presentation.

Jon Armstrong, director of admissions, shared that we have received great feedback from high school counselors. They are truly grateful that FHSU is willing to travel to them. It is a great time to demonstrate our resilience by doing everything we can to show up – even when it is difficult.

Another great example of that “can-do” attitude is how we have been able to accommodate students who are not able to visit campus. For example, when one student was unable to come to campus, our team created a virtual visit. This particular prospective Tiger was so impressed by everything FHSU had to offer that shortly after she participated in the virtual visit, her completed application arrived in our registrar’s office. The high school counselor also followed up, requesting an FHSU pennant and swag.

Other pandemic-related adjustments we’ve made include converting our larger Tiger Day and Tiger Mania fall and spring events into Tiger Days – which feature multiple campus events with a maximum of 45 guests. This will be more work for our admissions staff, but I know the moment one person steps on this campus, the staff will become so energized, and they will feel the extra effort was worth it. They are always so genuinely happy when parents and students share how thrilled they are to be able to visit the campus. And of course, positive energy feeds positive energy. So, I know the quality, personal attention each student and family receives will be exemplary.

Fall 2021 recruitment is even more challenging than fall 2020. I am so grateful for our hard-working admissions staff who always go the extra mile to make our prospective students and campus visitors always feel welcomed. Thank you, unsung heroes, for your positive, restless spirit. I know you love to promote the power of an FHSU education – no matter what it takes!

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