

Celebrate scholarly research and creative work with FHSU

Visit the pages for Research and Scholarly Activities on our Fort Hays State University website, and you will find numerous opportunities to learn about scholarly research and creative work. At Fort Hays State, even undergrad students can participate in groundbreaking research activities. Research opportunities like the ones our students have are often reserved for upperclassmen and sometimes not accessible until grad school.

One of my favorite events for all students, faculty, and staff each year is the John Heinrichs Scholarly and Creative Activities Day, and the 2021 SACAD is quickly approaching.

This annual celebration of scholarly research and creative activities showcases on-campus and virtual undergraduate, graduate, Kansas Academy of Mathematics and Science, faculty, and staff research and creative works. This year's virtual program will be held on April 12-16, 2021. We will showcase student and faculty research, scholarship, and creative works at symposium.foragerone.com/fhsuscad – so please join us!

While our faculty and graduate research are always impressive, near and dear to my heart is undergraduate research, something I really value. There are several things I value about undergraduate research.

First, it is an excellent example of how we embrace our mission as a learning organization. A learning organization, according to Peter Senge, centers around people working together to enhance their capabilities to create results they deeply care about.

“People working together” on research and creative activity at FHSU is the second thing I value about SACAD. For our purposes, people working together means that faculty and students join forces around shared interests and curiosity. Faculty mentor our students through a process of learning and creativity that awakens confidence and new skills in our students. Faculty are very engaged in this process that fuels their passion for both their teaching and for scholarly and creative inquiry.

“I am always amazed at the high quality and creativity that is showcased at this event,” said Leslie Paige, director of the Office of Scholarships and Sponsored Projects at FHSU. “This is an opportunity for our students to present work that they are passionate about without worrying about the expenses associated with travel.”

Intellectual curiosity: check. Genuine relationships formed around common interests: check. Students feeling they matter, and they are learning: check!

Another thing I love about this program is that it builds off of the latter part of the definition: to enhance their capabilities to create results they care about. That is what makes these student-faculty relationships so powerful. Both the mentor and mentee care about the research they are generating, and both are learning about content and process. Our students build confidence in their research as well as their presentation skills by participating in scholarly and creative research. They are in a personal transformation process – like a cocoon becoming a butterfly.

New doors will be opened to them and they will leave this university a much different person than the one who arrived.

“I think educating the general public about the criminal justice system is important, especially in today's climate, and My poster is specific to the juvenile justice system, which is something the general public is not super familiar with,” said Beatrice Walsh, a senior from Thornton, Colo., who is majoring in criminal justice.

Walsh stated that creating a poster helped her learn more about why she chose her career field. “Laying out the problems within the juvenile justice system, as well as understanding what some of these kids go through in and out of the court system, allows us to understand how we can try to help them, and that is what I want to do, help,” she said.

I appreciate the fact that there are opportunities for our students to participate in undergraduate research or creative activity in virtually every department. This highly enriching activity is inclusive of all academic areas and all students. I am amazed each year when I visit the presentations and see such a diverse set of activities – from art to science to business. This just reinforces our laser-focused identity as an incubator of academic and artistic discovery.

Finally, I must mention how much I appreciate that the Scholarship Environment Committee, which sponsors SACAD, named this program after Professor of Geosciences, Dr. John Heinrichs (1957-2014). I had the opportunity to work closely with John when I served as Vice President for Student Affairs. I know first-hand how passionate he was about teaching and research. Indeed, that passion was contagious. John saw hope and dignity in every student who walked through our door, regardless of ACT score or other “standard indicators” of a student's propensity to succeed. He believed. He mentored. He inspired. He was a living testament to our ethic of care and resilience. Dr. John Heinrichs was a popular teacher, an internationally renowned scientist, and an esteemed colleague who had a tremendous impact on Fort Hays State University – and I believe he still does.

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