

The regional economic impact of Fort Hays State people

I am so very grateful for the many ways our local community supports Fort Hays State University. I am equally proud of the significant role FHSU plays in the community. Many of our faculty and staff reside here, send their children to local schools and serve as engaged citizens in myriad ways. Similarly, many of our students are employed here, live here and serve here. The friendships created warm the heart and often change lives. That is impact.

There is another impact made by FHSU that is not so obvious – the economic impact. In my last column, I shared the economic impact of our international students, which, according to the Association of International Educators, is estimated to be \$7.1 million supporting 37 jobs.

Recently, Drs. Emily Breit, Tom Johansen, and Samuel Schreyer completed a study of the economic impact of Fort Hays State University on the local economy for fiscal year 2018 (the fiscal year starting July 1, 2017, and ending June 30, 2018). Did you know that the total economic impact of the university on the Ellis County regional economy was estimated between \$175 million and \$234 million, supporting approximately 2,854 jobs?

Their research identifies consistent positive growth in FHSU's economic impact on the local economy – up to 300 percent overall for the last 30 years. This is just one gauge of the powerful impact of this university in its home region.

Key economic indicators included direct spending by the university and the FHSU Foundation; local purchases of goods and services by faculty and staff and their families; spending by students as well as visitors to the university (prospective students and their families, athletic and special events, commencement, band camp and many others); jobs created due to the presence of the university; and tax revenue.

Arts and music programs give so much to the community, from opportunities for participation and engagement to comradeship to skill enhancement. These activities also provide many economic benefits, as do high school sporting events, Special Olympics and the High Plains Music Camp, to name a few. These enriched our region by more than \$2.6 million, while special events at the Memorial Union brought an additional \$300,000-plus of spending to local businesses.

Students contributed to the community in a big way – approximately \$32 million in just one year, while their visitors spent an additional \$17 million. People attending FHSU athletic events spent nearly \$2.7 million, while guests of faculty and staff living here contributed another \$7.5 million.

Additional 2018 data from our Small Business Development Center indicates that in just one year it assisted in 37 business starts, resulting in \$10.2 million of capital investment, \$1.5 million in increased sales and 382 private-sector jobs.

During this same period, the university's Center for Civic Leadership contributed to the economic prosperity of Kansas by serving the greater public good with co-curricular activities designed to strengthen communities through deeper levels of civic and community engagement. That is a key aspect

of the university's mission. The center's 2018 data reveal that 57 events with 18 community partners was attended by 2,066 student participants. Those students also earned 5,213 service hours.

Unquestionably, Fort Hays State University is a powerful force for good in the Hays and Ellis County region, economically as in so many other ways, and has been since 1902. The message I take from the data is that our partnership is strong. We add value to the community, and the community makes us better. Our enviable town/gown relationship – whether counted by the strength of our positive interactions or in dollars – makes this a place where people connect deeply and sincerely, learn together, serve together and thrive.

Note: The full report, "Economic Impact 2018," is at <https://fhsu.edu/president/state-of-the-campus/index.html>.