

Focusing on the magic in a new year

In my last column I attempted to highlight the top 10 – okay 11 – FHSU accomplishments in 2019. I am so happy with our progress. As I turn my attention to a new year, I am brimming with optimism and excitement for what our university is destined to achieve in 2020. As the young novelist Josiyah Martin says, “The magic in new beginnings is truly the most powerful of them all.” To me, the “magic” of this new beginning is found in a wonderful mixture of talented people, plans, resilience, and opportunities.

I am particularly excited by the progress on the implementation of our strategic plan. I like to think of the strategic plan as the “magnetic north” where magic happens. A dedicated community embarks on a journey of discovery and creates initiatives aimed at achieving our mission: “Provide accessible quality education to Kansas, the nation, and the world through an innovative community of teacher-scholars and professionals to develop engaged global citizens.”

Our strategic plan is designed around five goals:

Goal 1: Academic Excellence – foster evidence-based best practices in teaching and learning supported by scholarly activities and professional development.

Goal 2: Student Success – create opportunities for all students and empower them to identify, evaluate, and achieve their goals while becoming engaged global citizens.

Goal 3: Strategic Growth – design and implement a plan for sustainable university growth.

Goal 4: Resources and Infrastructure – maintain and improve infrastructure and resources to keep pace with growth.

Goal 5: Community and Global Engagement – cultivate impactful partnerships, internally, locally, nationally and globally.

Thanks to the dedication of the more than 100 faculty and staff driving the work of the strategic plan, we enter 2020 with strong progress on each of these goals.

The year 2020 also raises the question – will we achieve a 20th consecutive fall enrollment record? Of course, each year that goal becomes even more challenging as the higher education landscape becomes both more competitive and complex. Despite the trends of enrollment declines in higher education, I have great faith in our community and a deep belief that the unmatched affordability and accessibility and the quality of the educational experience we offer will propel us to new records.

At Fort Hays State University, we don’t rest on our laurels. With our new strategic plan, we are taking a more data-driven and strategic approach to enrollment management from first contact through graduation. Our goal is to grow our online and on-campus student populations by leveraging our current strengths, regional workforce needs and emerging career opportunities. During the past four months, we undertook three major initiatives.

First, we identified academic programs to expand and new programs to create.

Second, we introduced a revised and more inclusive scholarship program that is based on an easy-to-understand matrix of GPA and SAT/ACT scores. Our improved scholarship program also puts a greater emphasis on promoting student success by making more of our scholarships renewable each year.

And, third, focusing on our goal to be a valued resource for students considering college, we developed systems that will deliver more timely and personalized communications with prospective students at each stage of their college decision process.

The New Year also signals the kick-off of our annual Scholarship Recognition Program, designed to recognize high school and transfer students who have been awarded FHSU scholarships for the next academic year. I am eager to join our faculty and staff on our 2020 marathon across three-states and in 12 cities as we meet and celebrate our newest Tigers. This year we have more scholarships to present thanks to the generosity of our donors who believe so deeply in an FHSU education.

I love this quote from Nido Qubein, president of High Point University, North Carolina, and a successful businessman and motivational speaker: “Your present circumstances don’t determine where you can go. They merely determine where you start.”

I am inspired by our strong starting position in this new year. I am renewed, as always, by the energy and aspirations of the people of Fort Hays State – its students, faculty and staff – and by the wonderful support we receive from our alumni and friends, from our home community of Hays, and from the citizens of Kansas.

Welcome, 2020. We embrace you with enthusiasm.