

At Fort Hays State, COVID-19 means converting, not canceling

In my last column, I wrote about the remarkable ways Tiger Nation was responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As I stated then, we are not only delivering our typical high-quality, engaging academic program—we are also committed to converting and transitioning as many of our events and services as possible during this crisis. Today I am thrilled to share a sampling of examples of how the campus is delivering on that promise. For instance:

It broke my heart to have to postpone commencement until it is safe for people to gather again. But that is not going to stop us from celebrating our outstanding students! I recently shared our commitment to deliver a commencement regalia kit to every spring graduate so that they can celebrate with their family and friends in the moment. No later than the second week of June, each graduate will receive a kit with a gown, a hood (for graduate students), mortarboard, tassel, commencement program and their diploma in an official Fort Hays State University diploma case. We hope our students will use this kit to celebrate their great achievement with the family and friends who helped them throughout their academic careers. We also hope they will post their photos on social media so we can like and congratulate and join them in celebrating.

The Writing Center is offering online appointments to all FHSU students for the remainder of the spring semester while campus is closed. There are two different kinds of appointments: synchronous – scheduled appointments – using video, audio, chat, and screen-sharing technologies, and eTutoring, which is asynchronous – available any time – for those students whose access to the internet may be limited or slow, or whose schedules may not allow them to meet with a consultant in real-time.

Forsyth Library staff, well known for their connectivity and creativity, continue to provide live research help to students, faculty and staff through the Ask-A-Librarian chat service. Our electronic resources for learning, teaching and research feature over 200 platforms and products for finding articles, ebooks, media and more.

On Friday, April 24, our Black and Gold Leadership Conference goes virtual. The conference will explore adaptive leadership, help our students develop strategies for leading in a virtual world, and create experiments to increase individual leadership capacity. The Friday session will be supplemented with an optional coaching session with our guest facilitator, Jason Bosch, who has over 15 years of experience with leadership and organizational development.

And we are not just keeping the minds active – our Tiger Wellness Center is also converting our fitness challenges, classes and educational sessions to social media. Each week, challenges will be posted on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Just look for #MoveMonday, #ToneUpTuesday, #WisdomWednesday, #ThriveThursday, #FoodFriday, and #WeekendWorkout. Short versions of classes are being posted to show everyone how to perform the workouts, as well as more in-depth videos educating folks on how to do an exercise. Wellness Center staff will also share healthy recipes. Our outstanding staff is on standby to provide helpful information and consult with students to help them achieve their fitness goals.

On April 28, one of our honor societies, Eta Sigma Delta, will conduct its induction ceremony in a fully virtual mode with Zoom. ESD is the international honor society for tourism and hospitality

management students. The ceremony will include both virtual and traditional on-campus students being inducted from California, Colorado, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Italy. Students will receive a certificate, pin, and graduation cord. The guest speaker will be Jordan Carlisle (an FHSU alum) who is now the assistant general manager of the Moxy Hotel (Marriott brand) in downtown New York City. He will share his FHSU story and industry experience and the challenges of working in NYC during the coronavirus pandemic. I love the fact that despite all the challenges, we will continue to honor, inspire, and be inspired by our students.

Our Management Development Center (fhsu.edu/cob/mdc/) is providing free mini-trainings (30-microburst sessions scheduled via Zoom); free Hays Chamber virtual lunch-and-learns (1 hour, Zoom, scheduled every Thursday), as well as online trainings (approximately 4 hours of content, both synchronous and asynchronous, \$20 a person). Topics include “Running an Effective Virtual Meeting”; “Work (or Home) Wellness: Preventing Health Risks Affecting Workers Who Sit”; “Staying Positive in Challenging Times”; and much, much more!

And we have not forgotten our faculty and staff. Thanks to Dr. Gene Rice, a professor in our Department of Philosophy, and in response to the many changes in our lives these days, he has invited our community to join together on Zoom once a week for a short course in mindfulness and relaxation meditation. When practiced over time, such meditations can lead to stress reduction and help us cope with mental and emotional anxiety. Great idea Dr. Rice!

One of my favorite spring events is our Student Organization and Award Reception, scheduled for April 30. Awards will be presented through Zoom by our Homecoming King and Queen, Bryson Homman and Jacki Dougherty. Winners will be celebrated on social media.

And imagine – this is just a small sampling of how this nimble and innovative community is coming together! We are also delivering education in unique ways to ensure our students are getting their labs, clinical hours, and service-learning assignments completed. Student teachers are assisting as colleagues in our newly-mandated, all-virtual learning world, and more than 4,000 students in China can complete their FHSU assignments on their telephones!

At FHSU, we continue to utilize technology while keeping that important human connection front and center. I love this place!