

A case for college

If you monitor the news about higher education, you know quite a few colleges and universities are considering or implementing unprecedented measures to stave off financial disaster – employee furloughs, position eliminations, and reducing, eliminating or merging programs.

Thankfully, we are not in this position thanks to our sharp focus on relationships that drive retention and our relentless focus on student success. The highest levels of academic excellence, student mentoring, care, and grace are hallmarks of an FHSU experience. But the concerns among those who question the value of a college education have only grown stronger over the past several months.

Recently, I began a project to learn more about the experiences and reflections of about a dozen of our soon-to-be graduates. I am excited about sharing some of their stories over the next few weeks. Today, I want to share the journey of one of our online, non-traditional students, Jonathan Jett, from Prattville, Ala.

In his words:

My FHSU story starts about a year before I applied. I was seeing people all around me receive promotions when they had minimal experience and a college degree. I had many years of experience, but no degree. Finally, in what I would have described at the time as a “dream job,” I was one of only two candidates left. The other person had zero experience but landed the job. I asked what had set her apart from me, and was told that her college education did.

I was finally angry enough to do something, and I applied to FHSU's leadership studies program knowing nothing more than what it would cost me financially. I had zero intentions of applying myself, participating outside of minimum requirements or anything else. I was only pursuing a “piece of paper.”

As I was nearing my senior year, I started to sense a few changes in myself. My decision to not apply myself had changed to being on the dean's list every semester (except the one where I took statistics). It was in the summer term of 2018 that I experienced a defining moment in not only my time as a student at FHSU, but in defining myself and who I wanted to be.

In LDRS 670: Leadership and Personal Development, one of the texts was “Life Entrepreneurs.” In the first chapter there is a chart where individuals can be placed into one of four quadrants based on their level of direction and drive. All my life I had been what the authors called a drifter in that I had low direction and low drive. I realized that I was increasing in drive and was becoming a seeker. I determined that I was going to make changes to my life so that I had both direction and drive. I was going to become a captain – a position that I had never taken before, even though I was what would appear to be a successful adult.

I graduated with my bachelor's degree in May of 2019 and immediately began working harder as a graduate student. Soon I will complete the requirements for my master's degree from FHSU.

The student who applied to FHSU in 2017 no longer exists. That person was fearful of risks or applying himself, the epitome of lackadaisical, and saw zero potential in himself. Today's Jonathan Jett has learned to take risks. To apply himself and learn more. To work with and rely on others. The student who was first accepted to this school and was only focused on "that piece of paper" has an undergraduate degree.

My professors somehow opened my eyes to what was going on around me, and I saw real change within myself – something that I am eternally grateful for.

But the story does not conclude here. Before FHSU, I had dropped out of college four times. I felt that a college degree was unattainable. Now I have a bachelor's degree and, shortly, a master's degree. In less than a month, I begin a Ph.D. program!

FHSU has, quite literally, changed who I am and prepared me for this next phase in my life. Four years ago, my dream job was an entry-level position with no hope of moving up. Today, I am embarking on a journey that will allow me to call myself Dr. Jett. The difference between these two people is FHSU.

There are so many Jonathans in our student body. We exist to serve those people who want a chance to change the course of their lives – and to do so at one of the most affordable universities in the nation. If you have ever thought about pursuing a college credential, I urge you to take action – like Jonathan. Let us help you imagine and achieve a new future.