

Grads embrace the opportunity in meeting unexpected challenges

I recently had an opportunity to talk with some of our graduating seniors to learn more about their experiences and reflections as they complete their education. No surprise, their stories were inspiring, fun, and authentic. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce you to some of our amazing students and share a small part of their journey.

Evelyn Irigoyen-Aguirre, Garden City, is an organizational leadership major, currently employed through the Student Engagement Office as a transition specialist working on FHSU's Care Team, Diversity Events, and the Hispanic College Institute's amazing Tiger Team. Evelyn is planning to attend graduate school at FHSU to begin her career in student affairs – and that makes me very happy!

According to Evelyn, the transition to remote learning has inspired a different perspective on the importance of offering different ways to learn. "I admire and respect those who enjoy online learning. I am thankful FHSU has been able to provide the best support and resources with the help of the Kelly Center." She continues, "There have been numerous professors who have cared about me as a person. Everyone at FHSU is very caring and helpful. I have had the opportunity to work with professors in teacher ed, geosciences, HESA and especially the Leadership Department. Whether I was working with them, traveling in study abroad, taking their courses or working in community events, they are all able to value who I am and teach me to become a better leader."

Kaytee Wisley, Wichita, is a political science major heading this fall to the University of Virginia for a master's degree in public policy. Kaytee has been very involved in student life, including serving as the legislative affairs director for the Student Government Association and the Honors College. She is really thankful to be able to participate in both organizations virtually when classes transitioned to remote teaching and learning. I am excited for Kaytee's journey into public service. I know she will put her talents, heart, and knowledge into making our world better.

Kaytee described her transition to remote learning this way: "I am currently in my political science capstone course and bioethics, and both have made the switch very well! I think the courses are a bit different because we do have Zoom discussions, which isn't something I've had in my past online courses. We still meet during the regular class time, which has helped me maintain a regular schedule! I think the transition is allowing us to be more innovative, especially student organizations."

Kaytee also talked about the FSHU community: "I've been really shocked at how well the community of Fort Hays is still coming together while we aren't able to physically come together. I still feel connected to campus and connected to my peers even though I am not seeing them in person. It has been really beneficial to know that the support systems we had before are still there, just in a slightly different form."

Holly Dethlefs, Ravenna, Neb., is currently student teaching and has accepted a position for the 2020-2021 school year teaching sixth grade in Nebraska. She and her fiancé, who are getting married in October, have been together for more than six years and have four "fur babies" along with their livestock. Holly is very excited and optimistic about her fall.

Her transition to remote learning was a bit different since she was in the middle of her student teaching. According to Holly, “Until March, I was in the fourth-grade classroom learning from two great mentor teachers. I miss my students so much. The COVID-19 crisis required us to transition to instruction through packets and through online learning on their iPads. I have taken online classes before, but it was definitely different for fourth-graders to try to continue education online. While my student teaching experience is not turning out how I expected, this experience has definitely taught me how to be flexible, adapt, and to continue to keep my students’ education as the top priority.”

Kate Westerhaus, Junction City, is majoring in biology and secondary education. She is currently completing her “incredible student teaching experience” at Hays High School and is excited to begin her first year of teaching at Hays Middle School. It is always extra special when our alumni make a home in Ellis County!

Through taking online classes, Kate said, she has observed multiple ways of setting up online classes and found the methods most effective for delivering content online. Her technology classes at Fort Hays, specifically Instructional Technology with Dr. Rigler, have introduced her to a wide array of learning platforms that she can utilize in her classroom.

Kate says, “These experiences at Fort Hays have tremendously helped me in my remote student teaching. I miss seeing all of my students in person every day, but I am so thankful that we have so many ways to communicate digitally. This transition to remote learning has stimulated my creativity and made me realize all of the things we commonly take for granted. I think that in challenging times like these, we must remain positive and find the good in each day.”

Well said, Kate. Indeed, we must all remain positive and find the good in each day. I am so pleased that our students, through the support of caring faculty, have learned lessons of resilience and how to thrive in the midst of challenges. Those talents will indeed make our world a better place.