

Other Viewpoints

Rise in enrollment at Fort Hays State cause to celebrate

Of all of Kansas' state universities, Fort Hays State University might be taking the most active – and creative – steps to grow. So, when President Ed Hammond says he wants to double enrollment by 2020, even as enrollment is dropping at other state universities, we believe he can make it happen, especially because the college has done it before.

Just 10 years ago, the university had 5,506 students. This fall, enrollment was 11,883.

But Fort Hays hasn't relied on more students coming to its campus to make this growth happen. It has built up a virtual program that allows students to obtain degrees through online courses, and it has even gone so far as to develop a China program, which opens a market outside Kansas and the U.S.

Today's total enrollment includes about 4,500 students who attend classes on campus. Another 4,000 are virtual students, and 3,500 are Chinese students who take classes either online or from Fort Hays faculty who go to China on temporary teaching assignments. The program allows Chinese students to earn bachelor's degrees in business administration, leadership, political science/prelaw and information/networking/telecommunications.

Fort Hays was the first U.S. university allowed to offer degrees in China, so it was an innovative step forward. And these ventures into nontraditional education have allowed the college to generate the money it needs to sustain its campus and maintain quality in faculty and programs. It also helps keep tuition rates manageable. Fort Hays, with a charge of \$101.15 a credit hour, offers the lowest tuition among Kansas state universities.

At a time when Kansas universities are seeing their enrollment dip, with the exception of Fort Hays State, in favor of community college and technical training, Fort Hays appears to have the model to meet the needs of the day, and at an affordable price. That will go a long way toward helping it meet its goals.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Alphabet soup get confusing

Our editor pointed out to me this morning that the initials listed after someone's name in a story could stand for at least five different things, including credentials, civic organizations and scientific processes.

We get blank looks, when we tell people we don't use acronyms – we have to spell things out, even long things like Western Kansas Liberty League (WKLL).

Acronyms tend to be somewhat meaningless to outsiders. WKLL could just as well be the name of a radio or television station. MD can stand for medical doctor or muscular dystrophy or even Maryland.

I grew up with acronyms that were very familiar. At one time, in the distant past, I probably thought that everyone knew that BYF meant Baptist Youth Fellowship, that MENC meant Music Educators National Conference.

Apparently, music educators still use the initials, though the organization is now named The National Association for Music Education. According to The Free Dictionary at acronyms.thefreedictionary.com, BYF can stand for Boyfriend, Baptist Youth Fellowship, Boston Youth Fund, Bring Your Friends, Bring Your Font (chat rooms) or Bangladeshi Youth Forum.



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

Acronyms tend to mutate over the years.

I took an informal poll, and learned that almost no one under 40 in our office knows what the DAR is (either Darling International Inc. or the Daughters of the American Revolution). Most recognized VFW as Veterans of Foreign Wars. I drew a complete blank on BPOE (Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks) and only the over-50s recognized BPW as Business and Professional Women (it's also Board of Public Works).

On the other hand, the younger members of the staff were quick to identify OMG (Oh, my God), BTW (by the way), TTYL (talk to you later) and LOL (laugh out loud). There was a little disagreement on SMH, so we looked it up and found it stands for either shaking my head or scratching my head, but it also is an abbreviation for Semiconductors Trust and the

Sidney Morning Herald.

In the items that cross my desk on a regular basis, CPD means Colby Police Department, THSO means Thomas County Sheriff's Office, etc. Then there's another list with things like ACRE (Average Crop Revenue Election) and all the complicated acronyms for government programs. I'm a fan of farmers, and I'm glad the government helps them out, but I have to say they have some weirdly creative people coming up with names for the programs just so they say have a cool acronym that sounds like a farm program.

Then there's the education department. School calendars are full of acronyms, from the above-mentioned WKLL to BB which stands for both baseball and basketball. If I forget what season it is, I'm sunk. Yes, I realize that the poor beleaguered school secretary has to get a lot of information in those little tiny boxes, but it's still a challenge to decipher.

I could go on and on, but FYI I'm running late, so TTYL.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Are college dropouts really a problem?

Students who dropped out of college after just one year between 2003 and 2008 cost Kansas taxpayers over \$93 million dollars, according to a study released this month by the American Institute for Research.

First-year college dropouts cost the nation over \$9 billion in state and federal appropriations and grants.

"Finishing the First Lap: The Cost of First-Year Student Attrition in America's Four-Year Colleges and Universities" by the institute used the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to tally dropout data from 1,521 four-year colleges and universities. While 528 public universities ate up the state appropriations, the bulk of state and federal grants went to students at the 73 for-profit and 902 not-for-profit private schools.

The knee-jerk response of public agencies across the United States has been predictable: what can we do to keep all of these students in college? Across the United States, both commissions of higher education and public-relations-sensitive administrators have been demanding that more college students be retained at all costs – a reckless but contagious policy I have labeled "retentionitis."

Professors in the classroom have a much better idea of the many reasons for why so many college freshmen drop out.

Thanks to the overtesting for minimum proficiency that has decimated public education under No Child Left Behind and seriously inflated grades at many schools, more students are graduating with a false sense of being col-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

lege-able. While many college-ready students excel in the freshman year, many others hit the cold reality of rigorous college coursework and find they can barely handle the remedial sections, let alone the regular classes.

Other students conditioned to test-prep are unprepared to read and think independently. Some have never developed a study ethic. Indeed, some never come to class, and thanks to federal privacy laws, professors cannot tell this to parents who inquire.

Some high schools make students feel like they are failures if they do not aspire to a four-year college degree, even though the student wants to be an auto mechanic or plumber and our society desperately needs their skills.

Data support faculty observations. ACT finds that only 25 percent of ACT test-takers are college-ready. Other studies confirm that selective private schools average about one-fourth students who are not college-ready, nonselective public universities have about half, and only one-fourth of community college students are college-ready. That is roughly the proportion of community college students who aspire to a two-year associates degree and actually complete it.

To meet artificial goals for international ranking, educational governing bodies are insisting that public universities graduate more students in spite of the overwhelming evidence of the dangers of grade inflation. Retain or else! Only the University of Kansas among the state's schools appears likely to increase retention by raising admissions standards, though that may lower enrollment. Our other Kansas public universities are numbers driven, and in a tuition-driven system what administrator can rebel?

With state money stretched to attempt to subsidize more unqualified students, the qualified students are having to pay a higher proportion of their educational costs.

There is an old and erroneous legend about college professors telling students on the first day: "Look to the left. Look to the right. At the end of this course, one of you will not be here." Instead, we are more likely to hear in the near future: "Look to the left. Look to the right. Everyone gets to pass and graduate. Those who do the hard work to earn your degree will see your classmates also walk across the stage and receive that degree for half the work."

For those who insist that a bachelor's degree is the new high school diploma when it comes to getting a job, the tragedy of retention is that this degree may represent no more knowledge and skill than the high school diploma once did.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

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Mallard Fillmore

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