

FOCUS

*Belong
Here.*

Go Further.



Letter from the President

To be known is one of the deepest human desires. In this complex digital age, younger generations often turn to vacant online communities in an attempt to find belonging. While these groups might provide a creative space for shared interests or experiences, they fail to provide that meaningful, walk-through-life's-ups-and-downs-together kind of relationship. This need to belong fuels our mission at Friends University. We exist not just to guide students toward graduation and successful careers, we help students invest in and be changed by the lifegiving and engaged community of students and faculty here.

Community is designed for connection and growth. It's in authentic and caring relationships that we spur each other on, encourage one another in tough seasons and call each other to a higher standard. Teammates teach us humility and shared vision. Music ensemble members show us the joy in collaboration. Professors offer creative solutions, a listening ear and career advice. Spiritual Life Assistants demonstrate grace and the love of Christ. Every connection point provides opportunity for personal development, helping prepare students for passionate careers.

Students should find a home at Friends,

but they will also be empowered to go out into the world, resourced with newfound skills, experiences and professional networks to propel them further than they could've imagined. It's about guiding students into a career that fuels their purpose, with a supportive Friends community standing behind them and cheering them on.

Belong here. Go *further*.



Dr. Amy Bragg Carey
President, Friends University





PHOTO BY MICKEY SHANNON

Belong Here. *Go Further.*

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On the Cover

Davis Photo taken in the spring, with polaroids depicting students, faculty and alumni from the 2024 Egypt mission trip, 2026 Homecoming Alumni awards, 2024 Commencement, 2025 Trip to Washington D.C., and 2026 Campus Ministries service project.

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CMFTL TAKES CHARACTER FORMATION STATE-WIDE



The Forming
Character Across
the Curriculum
cohort



In May 2025, Friends University was one of 42 institutions nationwide awarded a \$50,000 Capacity-Building Grant from the Educating Character Initiative (ECI), as part of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University. The funds will enable the Center for Mission-focused Teaching & Learning (CMFTL) to launch multiple university-wide and regional initiatives as part of its project, *Becoming Friends: Forming Character in Communities of Practice*.

Becoming Friends is led by the center's director, Dr. Lori Kanitz, who successfully wrote the grant proposal to secure funding, and seeks to provide innovative teaching, creative programming and cutting-edge research on leadership and character formation across the campus and region.

The project aims to align current and new character-formation initiatives through cultivating a shared vision and vocabulary in various communities of practice at Friends, as well as offer opportunities to explore educating character initiatives across the state with peer institutions.

One faculty project, "Forming Character Across the Curriculum" (FCAC), is an interdisciplinary faculty cohort that practices revising course curricula around a selected virtue and embeds it into course content and practices. The cohort met monthly in the fall semester to learn best practices and redesign course elements. The FCAC participants are now teaching the courses they redesigned and continue to meet monthly to discuss the pedagogical journeys of each course in progress.

An FCAC participant, Dr. Lydia Bechtel, is excited about the dedication of her peers in the cohort and their early successes, as she looks forward to incorporating the FCAC lessons into her teaching.

"In being a part of this cohort, one of the greatest gifts has been seeing how much my peers care about their course design. While I have many plans to incorporate virtue formation in a variety of classes, I'm most excited for the ways that I can form character in students whom I work with as a private voice instructor over the course of four years," said Dr. Bechtel.

In March, Friends University also hosted Kansas Independent Colleges Association (KICA) academic leaders for a "Character Conversations Summit" in which state-wide participants explored aspirations regarding undergraduate character formation. Friends seeks to be a character-education resource hub and collaborative thought partner for peer institutions and beyond.

Because of the overwhelming feedback from the Friends community, Dr. Kanitz is pursuing more projects than initially proposed and has already sought more funding through the ECI to help supply the next three years.

"It is extremely competitive, but the hope is that, if awarded, we will be able to continue the projects begun this year and add several new ones," said Dr. Kanitz. "The proposed project, *Flourishing as Friends: Cultivating Character in Communities of Practice* is designed to augment the current university strategic plan, "Vision: Flourish," and help create a robust culture of character at Friends shaped by our RISE values."

SERVING BY FAITH: OUR CAMPUS MINISTRIES TEAM

As Friends University continues to live into the title as the preferred Christian university in the region, a large part of our effort is driven by our Campus Ministries. These passionate individuals serve the campus in many ways: by leading Chapel, hosting worship or simply being an ear to talk to. But in every way, this team is ready to walk alongside our students, no matter where they may find themselves in their faith journey.

MIKE JADERSTON

After receiving his master's from Friends University's Spiritual Formation and Leadership program and spending more than a decade serving in youth ministry in Wichita, Mike Jaderston joined Friends University as Director of Campus Ministries in 2022. In January 2026, he stepped into his expanded role as Dean of Campus Ministries & Campus Pastor. Across every role, one goal has remained constant — helping students take a step toward life in Christ.

The way Jaderston invests in students traces back to Sterling College, where his mentor, Dr. Henry Lederle, modeled grace in action. That foundation shaped Friends' Spiritual Life Credit (SLC) program, designed to guide students in their spiritual formation, which he built alongside Miranda Shackelford. Inspired by the depth of faculty and staff around him, Jaderston cast a vision for the whole community to participate, building

a program rich with vibrant, flexible opportunities for students to grow in their faith.

"I'm excited to see the community grow in energy and vitality. The people that have come together to pray for the university, the work of our board and faculty, and everyone who's been devoted to the community has been such a blessing," said Jaderston.

MIRANDA SHACKELFORD

Since starting at Friends University in January 2023, a constant in Miranda Shackelford's life has been the love for her students' spiritual transformations. As the Associate Campus Pastor of Formation, Shackelford uses her "green thumb for the soul" to take ideas from inception and build them into thriving programs, such as the Friends Youth Institute — a personal pride and joy. She intentionally seeks a relationship with the people around her, whether it be through individual meetings or in passing in the Campus Ministries Lounge.

"I love hearing about the incredible breakthrough moments that are only explained by being in the presence of God. That's the chef's kiss moment for me," said Shackelford, who finds herself incredibly privileged to be with the students through their brightest and cloudiest days.

Surrounded by a team passionate about life's journeys, she looks forward to

witnessing the fruits of unseen labor on campus, as the year-by-year construction of relationships finally start to bloom.

REBECCA ARHEART

Looped in by Shackelford after her retirement from a veterinary health center, Rebecca Arheart joined Campus Ministries as an administrative assistant in May 2025. It was a drastic change from her previous career, as it was hardly comparable to the high stress work at a clinic. But with the grace of her team, encouragement from her family and her "fix-it" mindset, Arheart felt that peace was integrated into her transition.

"I feel like I am finally starting to create a rhythm for my place on campus. God only knows what's in store, but I look forward to growing my relationships with students, faculty and staff, and seeing the growth in the department," said Arheart.

While Arheart may not spend her days healing God's furry critters, there is still a wagging tail at her side. **KEERAN**, a Border Collie/Australian Shepherd mix, is a licensed therapy dog that joins Arheart at work every Monday and Thursday. Keeran is essential to the team, as not only does he invite students to enjoy the lounge but offers a more supportive (and belly rub focused) relaxation.

ZACH BUSICK

Performer, songwriter and Friends University Worship Coordinator Zach



Top: Zach Busick,
Miranda Shackelford
Middle: Rebecca Arthart,
Terrence Phox, Mike Jaderston
Bottom: Keeran

Busick decided to share his talents when he joined the Campus Ministries team in August 2025. Always having been musically inclined, Busick has led worship since he was 15 years old and continues to express that passion every day through the student-led worship band.

“My favorite part of the job is getting to know so many skilled and enthusiastic students. So many of them have other musical outlets, but to see them use their talents in this way and serve their fellow students in chapel has been exciting,” said Busick.

Adapting to a less hands-on approach, Busick leads from an off-stage position, compared to the producing roles he had before. By taking a step back, Busick has gained a new perspective,

allowing student band leaders to manage practices so he can focus on the opportunities each week presents. While he steps in to perform when needed, Busick still loves to guide the students’ growth and challenges them to perform exciting, new pieces that are both rewarding and fun.

TERRENCE PHOX

Current Friends University women’s assistant basketball coach, Terrence Phox, joined Campus Ministries as the Coordinator of Student-Athlete Spiritual Life in April 2026. Student athletes balance their schedules around sports and classwork, often forgetting to actively engage in their spiritual growth. To help, Phox wants to build relationships

between campus ministries, local churches and his athletes in an effort to create homes away from home.

“At the end of the day, we’re all blessed to have an opportunity to play the sport we love. And when that final horn sounds, no matter the result, we still have the ultimate gift. That’s what we need to focus on: the privilege we have from our salvation,” said Phox.

More than just a position, Phox prioritizes visibility among each sport, as presence and availability is the foundation to connection and community. From being a listener to a proactive mentor, Phox is eager to see how God will use his gifts in this position for the growth of spiritual life on campus.

A PERFECT EQUATION: CRUMRINE + HORIZON AWARD

Stemming from the Latin word “tector,” a teacher is defined as “one who provides moral guidance to another.” The title of teacher is not just a career; it is a quality. They are mentors, coaches, families, friends and even strangers. While not all teachers are recognized beyond the students they challenge, there is still much to celebrate when one excels.

Friends University alum Nolan Crumrine ‘24 was one of 32 recipients statewide to receive the 2026 Kansas Horizon Award. This honor, developed by the Kansas State Department of Education, recognizes exemplary first-year teachers who distinguish themselves as outstanding educators. This January, after being lured into a conference room with leaders of the district, Crumrine answered a call from

Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson to find out he had been honored with a Horizon award.

“I kept saying thank you, over and over, not because it’s what you’re supposed to say on camera, but because I appreciate them for giving me a place to do my best,” said Crumrine.

Backed by a generational family of educators, Crumrine always knew he wanted to teach. Both of his parents taught, as well as his grandfather, who was an educator, principal and superintendent for over two decades.

“My dad spent 31 years teaching and was the head basketball coach for 30 of them. From the standpoint of him being a teacher and a coach, I feel like my teaching style strongly reflects off of his. One of his strengths was building relationships with kids by upholding high expectations and helping them grow,” said Crumrine.

But it wasn’t just family ties that influenced Crumrine, as he respected

one of his former math teachers, Doug Mabry, who was also a head baseball coach and football coordinator, for his ability to balance a heavy core subject and his influence as a coach.

“I valued education from a young age and I’ve always been good at math. Not to mention specializing in math is a strong asset from an employability standpoint,” said Crumrine.

When deciding to pursue an education degree, Crumrine needed a program that would concentrate on the hard skills of higher education as well as reflect lessons on building relations and producing quality members of society. Combined with his ability to play baseball, Crumrine found that his stubborn work-ethic and call for community integrated well on the Friends University campus, where he found even more supportive mentors.

“The education program at Friends University put together a really comprehensive package of tools for me to use. At no point I felt like I was unequipped for my career,” said Crumrine.

Now, Crumrine is opportunistic in his position at Valley Center High School. He’s excited to lead his first batch of senior graduates, as well as help develop the football program after a previously significant season. Most importantly, Crumrine is anticipating the opportunities to impact his environment wherever possible.

“How can I best lead these young students? How can I lead others professionally as a fellow teacher, coach and colleague? Continuing to grow my outreach and building others up is the only thing I can, and have ever, wanted to do,” said Crumrine.





A HALF-CENTURY OF FAITH, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Dr. Jerry Smartt is not a Wichita native, although many have not known this city without her. She has been in positions of leadership, a consistent attendee of Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, and a friendly face on the Friends University campus for 50 years. The abundance of community around her is one of joy and connection, and one that Dr. Smartt knows was given to her by the Lord.

In 1975, Dr. Smartt was hired at Friends University in a shrinking Spanish program but refused to let an opportunity for global education slip through her hands. Inspired by the travels of her childhood, Dr. Smartt created study abroad opportunities to Spain, Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Cuba. She pursued any opportunity that would grant her students access to bridge cultures beyond university classes, rather than only relying on textbook resources.

"I asked, how could this program grow? Where can I put my energy into supporting this branch of education, instead of letting it slip away? There may not have been an astounding amount of support, but I wanted to try," said Dr. Smartt.

She garnered dozens of students interested in seeing the world and learning from Hispanic

cultures. She created the Latino Leadership program, a scholarship program of outreach students with a 2.5 GPA and a desire to develop leadership skills. And most importantly, she touched the hearts of half a century worth of students, families and alumni, all whom she had built a connection with.

"In my classes, and even in Latino Leadership, I always tell my students that they are choosing to bridge two different but similar cultures. They can, and will be, someone who builds bridges through language, friendship and care," said Dr. Smartt.

Even after 50 years of teaching at Friends University, and even more building Wichita into a vibrant multicultural community, Dr. Smartt doesn't take credit for the lives she touched. While some may call it luck or coincidence, Dr. Smartt called it God's driven plan.

"I never expected to work at Friends for this long and never expected the unsolicited experiences that came to me," said Dr. Smartt. "I had the energy and a family that allowed me this stupendous career and life. But it was not in my hands; I was not in charge of this. God was there and presented me with so many opportunities, and I said 'Yes, si se puede'."

University News

Prompting the Future: AI Incorporation into the Classroom

As the value of artificial intelligence continues to grow in higher education, Friends University is reflecting its integration and influence into its own classrooms.

Associate Professor of Composition Dr. Kassia Krone recognized the development of writing skills was undergoing a dramatic change.

“Employers are devaluing undergraduate degrees because of widespread misuse of AI in classrooms. It reflects onto liberal arts colleges, as well as the societal outlook on AI use altogether,” said Dr. Krone.

Through a featured AI expert, Dr. Krone discovered the intuitive roles of developing AI prompts and how its proper use could create space for

retaining information rather than forming dependence. Once comfortable with her own knowledge, Dr. Krone included platforms like Johnny-V, ResearchRabbit, and Semantic Scholar into her lectures, simultaneously teaching AI prompt writing and primary and secondary sources.

Much like Dr. Krone’s shift in curriculum, Assistant Professor of Marketing & Assistant Chair of Outreach Sean Cash is pioneering a new approach as well, by integrating AI assistants as a tool to support individualized assessment and knowledge retention.

These tools measure students’ comprehension of content and flag areas where students may be struggling. It also tracks how students interact with different resources and evaluates

assignments with insights on both strengths and areas for improvement.

“The AI assistants help access learning on an individual student basis,” said Cash. “The goal is to tailor feedback and improve outcomes, not just for comprehension, but for long-term retention.”

Both Dr. Krone and Cash have incorporated AI for the same purpose: for students to develop skills *from* AI, not replace them. The focus on emulating AI not only addresses the threat of AI incompetence but also puts an edge on student skills and experiences.

“If the students are going to be using AI, then they need to follow the proper procedures to gain valuable responses,” said Dr. Krone. “It’s meant to be seen on a resume, as a hard skill, rather than a crutch.”



Sean Cash and students



Students Mackenzie Cunningham and Isabella Stone in Dr. Krone's class, developing their AI chatbot assistant.

Christ-Like Service in the Air Force

As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, Friends University honors its alumni who have, and continue to serve, in the United States Armed Forces. For nearly a decade, Friends University has been recognized as a Military Friendly school, committed to supporting active-duty members, veterans and their families. Through flexible degree programs, streamlined transfer credits and access to financial aid, the university removes barriers to higher education for those who serve.

Whether preparing a transition into civilian life, advancing military ranks or pursuing professional development, these Air Force professionals discovered their degrees not only propelled their military careers, but rooted leadership, service and higher purpose into their daily lives.



BRIGADIER GENERAL (RET.) THOMAS PALENSKE

Human Resource Management, 1995

Brig. Gen. Thomas Palenske attended Friends University because it was the fastest, most affordable and convenient way to receive a bachelor's degree to advance in the military. At the time, he was married, had his first daughter and recorded eight years in the Kansas Army National Guard, but wanted to pursue a more technical position: a special operations helicopter pilot, which required a bachelor's degree.

After three decades of service of promotions and decorations, Brig. Gen. Palenske retired, although he

never stopped working. Influenced by the good men around him during his service, Brig. Gen. Palenske spends his time buying and managing franchises across Kansas, motivated to help people with strong work ethic to get them where they want to be.

"Without the opportunity that Friends University gave me, I'd still be at a distribution center and would have missed 30 years of awesome Air Force experience. I can't be appreciative enough to the institution, it fundamentally changed my life."

COLONEL ERICK LORD*Organizational Management and Leadership, 2002*

Working full time as a Kansas State Trooper and aiming to become a pilot, Col. Erick Lord searched for a nontraditional degree program that suited his busy schedule and discovered Friends University. The online format and engaging classes were attractive to Col. Lord, and his instructor's charismatic lectures made each sociology, leadership and management lesson a fascinating exploration of the human mind.

After graduation, Col. Lord continued his leadership education in the professional military. Much like his college classes, Col. Lord experienced vast perspectives and challenges while in the military, embodying Christ-like humility and willingness to change direction to overcome problems. Over the next two decades, he accumulated more than 2,600 flight hours, led as a deputy wing commander at the Barksdale Air Force Base, the world's largest bomb wing, and is currently the Commander of the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base, SD, the largest B-1B combat wing in the United States Air Force. Most recently, Col. Lord's men were seen over the 2026 Super Bowl, flying the B-1B planes during the national anthem.

"The Friends experience was different. I have people come and ask me, 'What was Friends University like?' and I love to tell them my story. I always look forward to the day I talk about my education or cross another Friends alum in my work."

**CHAPLAIN MAJOR DR. JAMES TAYLOR***Religion and Philosophy, 2003*

Chap., Maj. Dr. James Taylor grew up in Wichita, long viewing the historic clock tower on Kellogg as an unattainable historic site. Years later, that assumption proved wrong when he was welcomed onto the Friends University campus with open arms. Over the course of his education, he was inspired by Dr. James Bryan Smith, Dallas Willard Chair for Christian Spiritual Formation, to shape his leadership style around following Jesus in community with others.

A fourth-generation military service agent in his family, Chap., Maj. Dr. Taylor was inspired to lead through intervention and comfort for military individuals and their families. Chap., Maj. Dr. Taylor carried these lessons into the Air Force, where in his service he received the 2021 Military Chaplains Association Distinguished Service Award and was named the 2023 Field Grade Officer of the Year. Although to him, his greatest accomplishment is supporting people on their worst days and offering them hope.

"Friends University was my springboard into new opportunities. The university is proud to proclaim Christ on campus and leads with a heart of service. From that experience, I can bring hope and intervention through comfort."



30th Anniversary Flute Choir Concert

Initiated in 1995 when Amy Hoffman, Flute Choir Director, began teaching at Friends University, the Flute Choir celebrated its historic anniversary with a reunion concert in November 2025.

Hoffman commissioned a new piece by Jackson Anderson called “Visions of Rapture,” to be premiered at the celebration, a highlight of the performance. It was inspired by her favorite hymn, “Blessed Assurance,” written by Fanny J. Crosby, and centers around the profound expression of faith, hope and indwelling presence of Christ.

For this concert, Hoffman expressed

her excitement in a TV interview on KAKE news, where she and an alum discussed the program’s history and the reunion concert.

“I was really happy with how it went! The best part was having a former student join me for the interview to share her experience as a student of mine and now being able to join in the reunion concert,” said Hoffman.

The Flute Choir has previously been selected five times to perform at the Kansas Music Educators Association (KMEA) state convention and was chosen again to perform in February 2026.

The best part was having a former student join me for the interview to share her experience as a student of mine and now being able to join in the reunion concert

— Amy Hoffman



NASM Re-Accreditation

Friends University has successfully earned re-accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), a status held since its first accreditation in 1952.

The re-accreditation process involved a thorough review of Friends University's music programs, faculty and facilities to ensure students have a robust educational foundation in music and prepare them for successful careers in the field.



Riney Fine Arts Sculpture

Have you seen our new sculpture?

Created by Ethan Swope of Karg Art Glass, the "Light of the World" piece was inspired by the light of Christ, with the three points of fire representing the Holy Trinity. The piece was installed in the Chapel garden, west of the Riney Fine Arts Center.

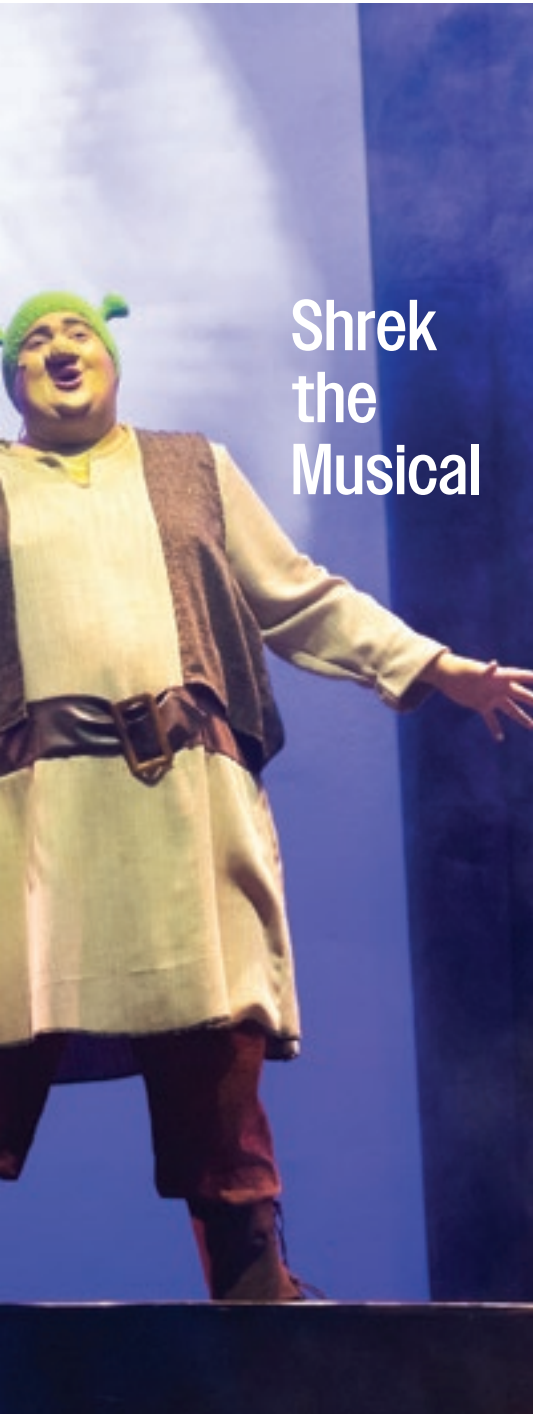
The Sounds of Bells at the Christmas Candlelight

A seasonal tradition on campus, the annual Christmas Candlelight Concert opened its doors in December to welcome the community and holiday spirit. Each of the seven ensembles in this year's program drew inspiration from the beloved carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, written in a moment when Longfellow found hope in the ringing of distant church bells.

There was no lack of joy in the Sebitts Auditorium as creativity, dedication and collaboration made this concert a welcoming introduction to the holidays.



The world's favorite cranky ogre was back! "Shrek the Musical," a stage adaptation of the hit DreamWorks animation, was performed at Friends University over Valentine's Day weekend, bringing a hilarious, family-friendly production to Sebitts Auditorium.



Shrek the Musical

Director of Theatre, Sarah Mae Lamar, and Director of Choral Studies, Dr. Rayvon Moore, led the stage and musical production, entertaining audiences with dazzling sets, whimsical puppetry and high-energy dance numbers.

Momentum in Wind

The Friends University Wind Ensemble presented four dynamic concerts this year, exploring sounds from musical safaris to swaying beats.

Pictured is the February 2026 showcase “IN MOTION,” a concert driven by energy, momentum and expression. Of special note was senior Kellon Johnsen’s arrangement of the Friends University March, a piece that has likely not been performed since the early 1900s. First composed in 1905, all that remained was a piano arrangement; Dr. Knopp asked Johnsen to orchestrate it for band and the new version received its premiere at this concert. Special guests included principal flutist Courtney Dunagan and the Junction City High School jazz band.





Junior Tiyna Ridge

Indoor Track & Field secured several spots for the NAIA National Invitational Meet, producing a national champion, a national runner-up and five PR's overall in the event. Junior **Carter Giittinger** claimed the national title and an All-America nod in the Men's Heptathlon. Junior **Tiyna Ridge** had a runner-up finish in the Women's 60 Meter Dash, just .01 seconds late to give the Falcons their second national title of the weekend.

Others that competed were seniors **Aaliyah Ramirez, Eddy Rachedi** and **Abby Green**, juniors **Julian Winters, Spencer Hines** and **Denzel Nyamwela**, sophomores **Aneesa Sheppard, Payton Willits, Fien Molenberg** and **Ian Russell** and freshmen **Isabella Garito, Marcus London, Logan Barnhill** and **Thomas Burk**. The final team scores saw the Falcon Men tie for 25th in the nation and the Falcon Women tie for 36th overall.

Head Indoor Track & Field coach **Henry Brun** was named KCAC Coach of the Year and the USTFCCCA Men's Central Region Coach of the Year.

'25-'26 Athletic Highlights

Football recorded their first NAIA FCS Quarterfinal appearance in history, charging the nation by being the highest scoring 4-year college football team in the country. **Eric Kelly** was named the 2025 FootballScoop NAIA Coordinator of the Year. Senior offensive lineman **Kyree Watkins** was selected for the 2025 Walter Camp NAIA All-America team and named 2025 KCAC Offensive Lineman of the Year. Six Friends University Falcons have earned a spot on the Victory Sports Network (VSN) NAIA All-America team. Friends University senior offensive lineman **Cole Herman** was honored with the prestigious CSC Academic All-America team as a first-team selection. After this astounding season, the Falcons were honored at City Hall by the Wichita City Council for their historic season.

Volleyball welcomed **Kortney Cunningham** as the new head coach.

The **Men's Indoor Track & Field Team** captured the KCAC Men's Indoor Track & Field Championship in February. The **Women's Indoor Track & Field Team** captured second place at the KCAC Women's Indoor Track & Field Championship.

Women's Wrestling had three wrestlers qualify for the NAIA National Tournament set in March: senior **Bailee Nelson**, sophomore **Kaylynn Martin** and freshman **Alexis Means**.

21 Powerlifters qualified for the USA Powerlifting Collegiate Nationals. They include grad student **Chase Martindale**, seniors **Jocelyn Cardona, Gennie Vitt** and **Thomas Noonan**, juniors **Pablo Martinez, Mikah Scott, Bradan Balman, Micah Barron, Chase Phelps** and **Christian**



Freshman
Braydon
Pacheco

Men's Wrestling climbed to No. 17 in the NAIA Men's Wrestling Rankings, the highest on record for the fifth-year program.

They quickly proved their power on the mat in conference, securing its first ever KCAC Championship in February. Men's wrestling was also

named KCAC Men's Wrestling Team of Character and Champions of Character. They hit a school record for NAIA national qualifiers, including seniors **Braden Ledford** and **Jason Bowers**, junior **Logan Davidson**, sophomore **Benedict Holthaus** and freshmen **Braydon Pacheco**, **Wyatt Gardner**,

Brady Duling, and **Cayleb Atkins**.

Bowers was awarded 2026 KCAC outstanding wrestler, showing dominance on the mat and leading a young Falcons squad. Men's Wrestling head coach **Tyler Mies** was named KCAC Coach of the Year for the second year in a row.

Landeros, sophomores **Brenndon Rivera**, **Gilbert Perez** and **Gage Bowker**, and freshmen **Falicity Favela**, **Alexis Blankenship**, **Breanna Palmer**, **Aleah Ortiz**, **Fabian Saenz**, **Patrick Davis**, **Ivan Rangel** and **Hayden McCarthy**.

Vitt won the National Championship in the women's 82.5KG At the USA Powerlifting Collegiate Nationals.

The **Competitive Cheer** team earned several podium finishes across their competitive season. They placed first at the season opening Falcon Invite, recorded a runner-up finish at the York Crown Classic and the OCU Classic, and posted a fourth-place finish at the Park Invitational. Head coach **Joshua Johnson** and competitive dance head coach **Taylor Stuchlik** were named KCAC Coach of the Year for their respective sports.

Men's Basketball climbed to No. 16 in the NAIA Men's

Basketball Coaches Top 25 poll in February, before advancing to their first KCAC Tournament Championship since 2014. They also announced five players in the All-KCAC Team selections, including seniors **Randy Woolf, Jr**, **Cahlese Lee**, **Collin Maclin**, **Ringo Deng** and freshman **Eli Benning**.

Women's Basketball announced four players on the All-KCAC Team, including graduate student **Lauryn McIver**, seniors **Rayland Garner**, **Abigail Barr** and sophomore **Kailee Peeler**.

Both teams fought to appear in the NAIA National Tournament, in which both men and women's first and second rounds were hosted at the Garvey Center. Men's reached the second round before falling short to Ava Maria University and women's ends their season to Hastings College in the first round.

Student Voices

Voice of a Lionheart

By Anna Carey

In 2023, Grace McClintock was at the height of her college volleyball career, when she suddenly found herself overwhelmed with exhaustion and discovered unexplainable bruising on her body. Doctors were surprised that McClintock was continuing to have success as an athlete after blood tests revealed that her body was fighting aplastic anemia. The shocking diagnosis cut her athletic career short, leaving no guarantee she would be able to finish her degree or reunite with her teammates.

The young sophomore returned home for treatment, where she endured months of extended hospital stays. Thanks to an audacious 33-year-old donor, rounds of chemotherapy and a successful procedure, McClintock says she was “given a second chance at life.”

Five months after her transplant, she made a cautious return to Friends University. Her first semester proved challenging as she took classes online and surrounded herself with only her volleyball teammates to avoid illness. By the spring, she was healthy enough to return to the weight room and with help from athletic



staff and coaches, she pushed her body to regain her strength and stamina.

Then, on August 21, 2025, McClintock suited up for the volleyball season once again, experiencing what she calls a “full circle moment.”

Her miraculous story caught the attention of the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA). They awarded McClintock the 2025 AVCA The Marines Battles Won award, a recognition for volleyball coaches and players who are “redefining courage.”

“I didn’t know if I was going to get a kill again. That was a pretty emotional moment for me and my dad, watching me go through everything,” said McClintock. “For anyone facing a similar situation, I encourage you to trust the process, give yourself grace and believe that God has a plan for you.”

For anyone facing a similar situation, I encourage you to trust the process, give yourself grace, and believe that God has a plan for you.

— Senior Grace McClintock

Voice of a Disciple

By Kirsten Smart

It is said that for God's plan, He starts with a whisper and gradually lets His voice grow. According to senior Rachel Tiller, the Lord had been shouting at her to pursue ministry when she finally decided to listen to her calling.

Tiller, now a graduate of the Friends University Christian Spiritual Formation program, had previously studied theatre and business at Butler Community College. It was here that she studied but didn't feel interested in her courses until an inspiring online New Testament class. Through the independent nature of the class, Tiller explored Scripture for the first time, and she built a strong interest in the early Christian thought and the formation of the church.

Tiller contacted Rev. Dr. Wendy Mohler-Seib, and the two devised a plan for her to come to Friends University. The strong Quaker community became dear to Tiller, as her involvement in Campus Ministries continued to fuel her passion in ministry. Through the Friends University program, Tiller visited Egypt on a mission trip, participated in campus events like Sundays @9 and even earned a pastoral internship at Norwich and New Covenant Church.

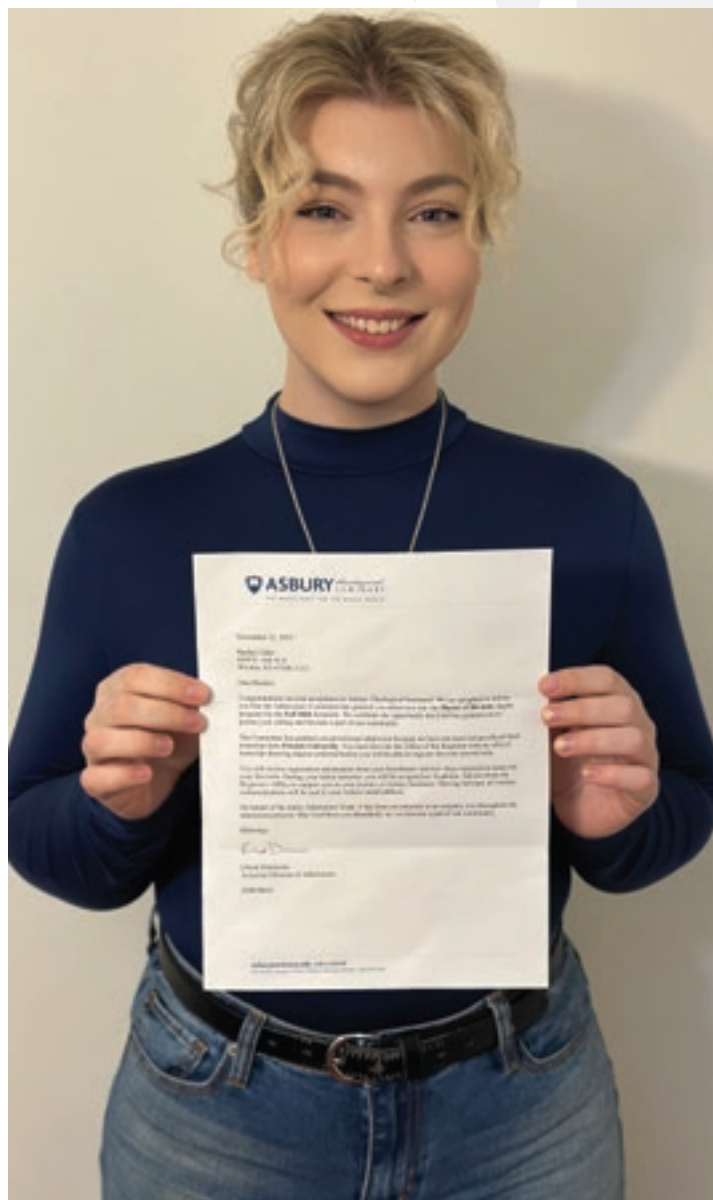
Along with Rev. Dr. Mohler-Seib, Tiller attended the Acts 242 Conference in Ohio this past year, where she met representatives from Asbury Theological Seminary. She discovered the seminary community was reflective of Friends University's own and quickly decided that she wanted nothing more but to continue her education there.

Now, as Tiller prepares to continue her service and education in Kentucky, she will remember John 15:19, *"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."* A verse that perfectly captures her desire to spread her faith and fulfill God's calling.

"I spent so long doing what the world wanted me to do. Taking a business degree because it made lots of money, or determined to go to Broadway for theatre, it was all ideas that other people had given me. But since God had guided me into the direction of ministry, I have never felt more at peace with the future and the sense of community around me," said Tiller.

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— Senior Rachel Tiller



Legacy Story



Brightup, Tos-Brightup and Stratton

Dr. R. Leroy Brightup '58 started teaching at Friends University in the Religion & Philosophy department in 1964, planting the roots to a flourishing legacy. For over 40 years, Dr. Brightup taught across the department, briefly served as the University Registrar and eventually became the Chairman of the Religion & Philosophy Division, developing and helping to deploy the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry program. His wife, Eva Brightup '86, worked at Friends for nearly 25 years, starting as a key punch clerk and retired as the planned giving assistant in the Development office. She graduated from Friends University with a bachelor's degree in English, walking the stage alongside her daughters, Lisa Tos-Brightup and Linda Stratton.

Lisa Tos-Brightup '86 graduated with two degrees, Spanish education — influenced by Dr. Jerry Smartt — and elementary education. While she craved independence, Lisa wasn't far from her family's support and would often visit her parents' while on campus for classes. She played flute in the band with former flute rivals, participated in service with the Sigma Delta Pi National Collegiate Spanish Honor Society and enjoyed dorm life with Laura Dungan, dorm mom and now lifelong friend. After graduation, she traveled to Texas for her initial career, before returning to Wichita where she married her wife, Natalie Tos-Brightup, completed 30 years of teaching and cared for her parents until they passed in 2023.

Linda Stratton '86 earned an associate in religion and philosophy, and a bachelor's in administration at Friends University. Although she was able to enroll in only one class with her father, he was one of many professors who helped Linda develop her critical thinking skills and integration of faith in work. She married Gene Stratton, Jr. after her sophomore year and later added two children to their family. Upon graduation, she spent 22 years as a travel agent. Due to a series of unfortunate events that affected the travel industry, Linda began a new career at Friends University in 2004. She has held several positions in the Registrar's Office, and currently serves as the Associate Registrar, echoing Leroy's presence in that department.

Linda's son, Christian Stratton, briefly attended Friends University as well, finishing his general education courses before transferring to pursue avionics. His wife, Katie Stratton '15 is a fourth-generation student at Friends University, reflecting the strong legacy of Friends alumni in her own and her husband's families. She graduated with a bachelor's in elementary education and spent ten years sharpening the young minds in her classroom. Katie tasted independence for the first time on campus, and used the positive, godly influences like Jeanette Parker, Gene and Linda Stratton and her parents to help define the relationship she had with the Lord.

Leroy and Eva's son, Kevin Brightup '88 & '97 remembers wandering through the Davis building in his childhood; from the creaky oak steps leading to his father's office and to fearfully staring down the stuffed grizzly bear in the upstairs museum. These pieces of history did not become a home until Kevin enrolled as a student for the first time. His passion for music was exemplified through the encouragement of his mentors, like Lisa Hittle and Fred Garlett, molding Kevin's external motivation to represent high achievement, even if procrastination weaved itself into his studies. Later, Kevin returned to Friends to pursue a bachelor's in music education, which led him to his current position as a K-12 band teacher for the Andover school district — a position he's held for 28 years.

While studying for her master's in family therapy, Kevin's wife, Jennie Brightup '03 became a first-time mom to Nathaniel Brightup, which introduced the hardest challenge of her life: balancing a new family and her graduate studies. But her community rallied around her; at home, Jennie had the support of recently retired Leroy and Eva, and on campus, Jennie was mentored by Dr. Dan Lord, whose compassion gave Jennie the tools to develop high-caliber skills for her own private practice, Bright Hope Therapy. Years later, she's thankful for the Lord's hand in her business, and for touching the hearts of her children, Nathaniel and Noelle Brightup.

Nathaniel Brightup '24 followed a family interest at Friends University, choosing to study music education like his father. Much of Nathaniel's childhood was spent on campus, attending annual Easter egg hunts and Homecoming parades. Once an official student, Nathaniel explored his musical passion, eager to participate in any ensemble and choir — even if it challenged his time management skills.

It was in Fine Arts where he met some of his most influential mentors like Dr. Shawn Knopp, Dr. Rayvon TJ Moore and Dr. Nick Schroeder, whom he still seeks advice from. Now, Nathaniel reflects community into his own position as Band Director in Buhler, KS, and is grateful for his hand in the education system.

Although they don't live across the street from campus, for all the Brightups,

Tos-Brightups and Strattons, there was only one word to describe the integration of Friends University with their legacy: home.

"For Friends...our experiences are more than family tradition. We visit the campus for concerts and events, we have the Brightup scholarship, and we feel so proud of the work we did and continue to do around here. For the Brightup history, this campus is a home," said Jennie.



Top: Nathaniel Brightup, Jennie Brightup, Katie Stratton, Christian Stratton
Bottom: Kevin Brightup, Lisa Tos-Brightup, Linda Stratton

Donor Profile



Paul Attwater and Kim Dugger Attwater

Paul and Kim Dugger-Attwater believe that by financially supporting Friends University, their donations allow them to multiply the impact of faith and education. Both their charity and philanthropy are rooted in a long-term, legacy-driven perspective, as they know their contributions will strengthen the community for generations.

Tell us about yourself. Family, careers, hobbies, etc.

Paul is a Senior Vice President and Financial Advisor with Morgan Stanley and will celebrate 40 years with the firm this year. He and his team have been recognized by Forbes Magazine, and he was named to the Wichita Business Journal Power 50 for 2025. Kim is a professional singer and performer whose career includes theatre, television and radio — including co-hosting The Don & Kim Morning Show. She has been a

performer in Nashville, TN, Branson, MO, and Wichita, KS. She also serves on the Friends University Board of Trustees.

They are a blended family with four sons and four grandchildren who are spread across the country but are always close in their hearts. Paul and all four sons are Eagle Scouts, which has given their family a lifelong love of the outdoors. Kim feels most at home at the beach, on the lake or in the pool. Together they enjoy spending time with friends and family cruising on their pontoon boat. Their two dogs, Maggie (an English Crème Golden Retriever) and Beau (an English Setter), are never far behind.

When did you graduate from Friends University and with what degree?

Kim graduated from Friends University in 1991 with a degree in Music Performance with a Vocal emphasis.

What was your favorite moment at Friends University?

Some of Kim's most meaningful memories were studying with her voice coach, Charlene Ayers, and performing in the Singing Quakers under Dr. Cecil Riney. When the Singing Quakers were invited to perform with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall on the Juilliard campus, Dr. Riney selected "Penderecki's Agnus Dei" from the Requiem of Reconciliation — one of the most challenging works Kim has ever sung. When the final note faded, the New York audience leapt to their feet, shouting "Encore!" Every member of the choir felt chills.

Why do you feel it is important to give back to Friends University?

Recently, Kim and Paul attended the Vision Summit in Scottsdale, where faculty, board members and donors explored the university's mission and future direction. Paul and Kim were presented with three pillars, Faith, Friends and Future, to support one. They chose to give to all three, because each plays a vital role in advancing the mission of Friends University. They believe Friends has a rich heritage and its best years are still ahead. Supporting the university is their way of investing in the future.

Did you have financial assistance when you attended Friends University? If so, how did that affect your education?

Kim received both music and academic awards and competed in pageants to earn additional scholarship funds while gaining valuable performance experience. That support made it possible for her to pursue her education and her passion for music, and it shaped her commitment to giving back so future students can have the same opportunity.

Alumni Spotlight

Dr. David Herndon

The measure of a life, Dr. David Herndon '05 believes, is found not only in achievement but in the service one can provide to others. That belief recently came into focus when he was nominated for the Heroes Among Us Congressional Award for his volunteer work at a local Tampa Bay medical clinic. An honor that reflects years of dedication to caring for others.

Dr. Herndon's path to medicine began in his father's own exam room and was further supported by his older sister's decision to pursue chemistry while attending Friends University. He followed his sister onto campus, where the years were demanding by any standard: working two jobs, raising cattle and playing collegiate soccer for the university. Yet he never doubted his ability to handle the load, as accomplishment was always the expectation.

"I never experienced 'burnout' because hard work and achievement have been the standard throughout my entire education. I never underestimated my abilities and always faced challenges head on. When people took on less, I took on more," said Dr. Herndon.

As part of a successful program — winning three conference championships in the four years — soccer was an anchor for Dr. Herndon's busy season. The level of camaraderie from his team and the extent of responsibility for success stuck

around long after Dr. Herndon graduated, forming lessons of teamwork, resilience and leadership that he would later draw upon in medicine.

Academically, Friends University's small class environment was a perfect fit for Dr. Herndon during his undergraduate studies. The coursework for two degrees, a bachelor's in chemistry and a bachelor's in biology, was rigorous, but once Dr. Herndon learned to allocate his schedule and energy, the pressure lost its power. He still recalls the meaningful open office hours with chemistry professor Dr. Kathryn Boyle, whose engagement helped develop Dr. Herndon's critical thinking and independent thought.

After Friends, Dr. Herndon earned his medical degree from Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed his residency at Largo Medical Center, where

he served as chief resident. Although he always envisioned himself in family medicine, an opportunity to serve in geriatrics "fell into his lap" and has since become a 13-year career that is both challenging and deeply rewarding.

Now living in the sunny landscape of Tampa Bay, Dr. Herndon remains true to the foundation of human connection in education and medicine, and that giving back to his community means providing others with the same opportunities he had. At home, he shares a life with his wife, Lindsay, and son and daughter, Liam and Caroline, who are both his biggest motivators and supporters. Together, from soccer games to dance recitals, Dr. Herndon can know that his life is one of steady purpose: as when faith, discipline and service intersect, the impact can reach farther than one's own life.



Spring 2026 Class Notes

In Memory

“In Memory” passages were submitted by family and friends. Information received after February 1, 2026, will be included in the next issue. We reserve the right to edit as space allows.

Leroy Addison died on January 1, 2022. He was active in the oil and gas industry, having worked at multiple companies around Wichita before eventually exploring individual drilling.

Lawrence E. Armstrong ‘66 died on February 24, 2025. A retired meat cutter and real estate investor, he enjoyed his free time working on rental homes and doting on his five grandchildren.

Georgia L. Ballard ‘99 died on November 5, 2025. She most recently worked as an SVP in Lending at Citizen’s State Bank and loved spending time with her family and friends.

Jack Bates ‘61 died on October 25, 2025. Beyond his full-time independent farming, he was an active member of the Clearwater United Methodist Church and Lion’s Club.

David E. Bennett died on April 16, 2011. He was a retired Farmers Insurance agent and loved to spend time with his grand and great grandchildren.

Leslie J. Berblinger ‘02 died on July 24, 2025. He spent 41-years at Cessna Aircraft, married his high school sweetheart and was present for every function in their children’s and grandchildren’s lives.

Ruth A. Bridgeman ‘96 died on April 25, 2025. A member of the American Nurses Association, she was a registered nurse and nursing instructor with a deep care for her patients.



Judith C. Boudreaux ‘94 died on November 12, 2025. Both her pursuit of a Master of Science in Employee Assistance Program from Friends University and the ensuing service at Via Christi Health System’s EAP were achieved in tandem with her husband in their lifelong quest to serve and educate. She spent her free time exploring creative writing, writing short stories, a 3-act comedy and poems, with the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Connie ‘57 and Elaine ‘58 Brown died on December 14 and December 8, 2025, respectively. Connie and Elaine met at Friends University in Fall 1955 and married that same December. Connie worked in the aircraft field before becoming a full-time farmer, buying land in

Arlington, KS to start the family farm, which Elaine helped manage after her retirement as a teacher in League City, TX. Connie was a quiet and gentle spirit that loved nature, and Elaine always had homemade desserts waiting for visitors.

Mary E. Burke '92 died on January 14, 2025. She served as a nurse and was referred to as the "Matriarch of the Mayflower Clinic." She spent her free time with her family and volunteering.

Nancy Cook '73 died on August 14, 2025. She spent her life rooted in the community, dedicating three decades to her nursing career.

Jessica E. Cox '09 died on September 18, 2025. She proudly served her country as a Finance Specialist, rising to the rank of Sergeant First Class. Her greatest joy was her family, including her wife, their five children and her in-laws.

Sandra P. Davis died on July 27, 2023. She dedicated over two decades of her life serving at HEB Hospital in Bedford, TX, and found joy in scrapbooking, gardening and exploring the world with her husband.

LaVonna S. Deffenbaugh '97 died on May 22, 2019. She was an IT Project Manager for The Boeing Company until her retirement in 2012, before enjoying her free time with her extended family of nieces, nephews, great nieces and nephews, and cousins.

Donetta S. Dreitz '02 died on August 21, 2025. She worked as an assistant in the registrar office of Seward County Community College and later became the college's registrar until retirement.

Lisa L. Dutcher '07 died in September 2025. A social butterfly at heart, she was a Wichita Paratransit bus

service driver for many years. She had an adventurous spirit and enjoyed traveling for family reunions.

Duane L. Dyer '64 died on June 9, 2013. He was a steadfast soul and loved his wife, sons and granddaughters dearly.

Twilla L. Eisele '63 died on December 18, 2025. She was a compassionate teacher who devoted time to her children, church, Meals on Wheels and other giving-based organizations.

Randy D. Eisenbarth '09 died on August 7, 2025. He was a supportive father who loved cheering on his children at their athletic events and spent his free time golfing and reading.

Rebecca L. Elder died on December 11, 2025. She was a tireless champion of regenerative agriculture, school choice and local libraries. As part of these efforts, she worked in several community gardens, including the Friends Garden at Friends University.



Dr. John Rhodes, a former faculty member of Friends University, died on October 15, 2025. He was the beloved chair of the Education Department and an Associate Professor for 13 years before retiring in 2020. He was remembered on campus as a dedicated and wonderful professor, and many said it was a blessing to work with him.

Eleanor "Ele" Louise Evans '47 died on September 8, 2025. After her studies at the University of the South, Eleanor developed a deep love for reading and engaging in the Great Conversation. She helped start the Northfield School of the Liberal Arts, two libraries and was an active member of the Heartland Community.

Gaye L. Friess '77 died on September 27, 2025. She dedicated her career to the 1st National Bank in Wichita, where she earned several promotions and was active in developing procedures for various operational functions. She possessed a charming personality and skill in needlecraft, both of which was loved by her husband and family.

Ronald G. German '92 died on November 18, 2025. He was an all-around athlete who taught his children the love of sports and was a respected coach at Garden City Community College.

Anna M. Green died on February 28, 2025. She was a Sunday school superintendent, Sunday school teacher and Bible school teacher at Elmdale Christian Church. She spent her free time serving the church, meal prepping for city service institutions. She was loved by her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Matthew "Matt" Grove '02 died on August 31, 2025. He had a keen interest in automotive design and technology and valued his time with family.



Right Reverend Bishop Mark L. Gilkey '94 died on August 19, 2025. He founded Agape Fellowship COGIC, which merged with St. Mark COGIC to form St. Mark Cathedral Church of God in Christ. He led with creativity, compassion and conviction in positions like music director and church administrator. His heart for the community was as strong as his heart for the church, and his leadership and generosity touched countless lives.

Beverly J. Kibbe '70 died on October 7, 2015. She taught in public schools for 30 years across Kansas and taught at a Sunday school after her retirement.

Brenda Kretzer-Kowitz '98 died on September 13, 2025. She was a dedicated bail bond agent for over 30 years and was a great storyteller.

Frank J. Mauro '52 died on October 3, 2025. He served in the Air Force for many years and was dedicated to raising donations for the National Museum of the Mighty Eight Air Force.

Roy McConaughey '76 died on May 29, 2024. He was inducted into the George Fox Sports Hall of Fame in 2021, worked in the Idaho State Dept. of Education and served as a minister, pastor and much-loved substitute teacher during his life.

Anita L. Mead '93 died on June 27, 2025. Her professional journey reflected her dedication to serving others, working in various roles at law offices, Cargill, Garden City Community College, Fort Hays State University and US BioEnergy.

Ann H. Mitchell '89 died on October 16, 2025. Her love for being an educator reflected in her years as both an English teacher and counselor, touching numerous lives through her work.

Joan M. Mullen '54 died on December 19, 2025. She was a member of the Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America and the Randolph Loving Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Donald Hanshaw '98 died on October 24, 2024. He was a handyman at heart and spent many years teaching electronics at Wichita Technical Institute, selling cars, building agricultural sprayers. He was most known for his warmth, wisdom and unwavering dedication to family and friends.

Gail K. Harvey '01 died on June 2, 2025. He spent the majority of his working years working at Gates Rubber Company in Iola, and was a dedicated husband, father, and grandfather, enjoying his free time coaching his daughters' summer softball teams.

Randle K. Hope '64 died on May 9, 2025. He had a hand in several industrial service industries, whether it was teaching at his high school alma mater or keeping his hands busy at Pitney Bowes.

Daniel M. Johnson '03 died on January 14, 2026. He was a custom harvester who valued the importance of education and family.

Alice R. Johnston '62 died on November 23, 2025. Although she had an admirable career as a Personnel Specialist for the State of Kansas, her most notable contributions were her charity and service commitments to the UbuntuLife Foundation, where she earned the name Cucu (grandma) and had a building named in her honor.

Fred E. Jones '73 died on November 27, 2025. Upon graduating from Friends Bible College, he worked as a youth pastor across the Midwest and South. He was an avid outdoorsman and loved his hobbies with his family and friends.

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Thank you for your support!

Samuel R. Jones died on December 18, 2025. He and his wife were avid Friends University fans. He worked at NCR and was the President of the Wichita Manufacturing Association.

Gerald Jolley '50 died on January 28, 2026. After his WWII service, he became a high school math teacher, basketball coach and high school administrator for many years.

Karen Kaufman '90 died on June 17, 2025. She was a CFP financial advisor for American Express until her retirement. She and her husband loved to travel the world.

Jon L. Netson '95 died on December 18, 2025. He was a faithful man who spent 30 years in IT at Kansas Farm Bureau. He and his wife raised four daughters who provided Jon with endless opportunities to serve as dad, coach, Sunday School teacher, youth group sponsor, and photographer.

Marjorie E. Osterman '69 died on July 29, 2025. She was an instructor at Wichita Business College for many years before serving as a school secretary. She known for her culinary gifts,

her kitchen a place of good food, warmth and cherished memories.

Helen M. Parli '68 died on August 12, 2025. She taught at Derby Elementary school for over 20 years as a second-grade teacher and was an admired mother and Christian.

Mary G. Pilosi died on July 24, 2021. She valued her large family, surrounded by love from generations before and after her. In honor of her passing, she asked to donate to the Kansas Humane Society.



Friends University donor and supporter, **Ronald D. "Ron" Ryan** died on February 27, 2026. After a pivotal meeting with the Chief Pilot of TWA in Kansas City, Ryan decided to pursue aviation, a career that would become his legacy. Ron flew more than 30 types of aircraft, accumulated over 30,000 flight hours, founded Ryan Aviation Corporation and later, Ryan International Airlines, and received dozens of awards in the aviation field. Yet for all his accomplishments, Ron's greatest pride was his family, including his wife, Renae, and his sons, Dale, Mark, and Scott.

Rebecca L. Potter '63 died on May 3, 2025. She spent her early career as a teacher for the Clay Central school district and helped with the Shugart family farm operation.

Brady Reichmuth '07 died on November 2, 2025. In 2009 he joined Bombardier and served as a Senior Mechanical Engineer and Project Manager. He was a devoted friend, son, uncle and husband who loved traveling, cooking and cheering for Nebraska Cornhuskers football.

Kenneth R. Rollins '95 died on June 21, 2025. He was an airline mechanic, traveled extensively and served eight years in the Army Reserves.

Dr. Mark A. Sanborn, a former Computer Science professor for Friends University who taught for 18 years, died in November 2025. He was blessed to have a large family and spent his free time planting and selling orchids with his wife.

Michael E. Schmidt '00 died on September 18, 2025. He spent 20 years as a marketing agent and loved to spend his free time playing golf, traveling to Puerto Vallarta and being with his family.

Karen M. Seidel '99 died on April 12, 2025. She was a teacher at Lyons Middle School for 34 years and was an assistant volleyball and spelling bee coach.

Bradley D. Setser '92 died on September 30, 2025. He was an advocate for spirited conversation, a lover of the arts and a devoted member of his motorcycle family, the Society of Riders Motorcycle Club.

Rickey L. Smith '65 died on August 22, 2025. A romantic at heart, he married his high school sweetheart and spent his career enjoying sales.

John F. Stevens '71 died on July 18, 2025. He loved being a teacher, a truck driver and the owner of Joe Stevens Appliance Company and always looked to provide his service and strength.

Zay L. Stewart '50 died on July 25, 2025. She was a teacher for 30 years and loved hosting family gatherings during the holidays.

Roger A. Suddeth '66 died on January 1, 2017. After a rewarding career, he retired from Fleming Foods, Inc. and spent his free time with his children and grandchildren.

Roger E. Syring '69 died on July 30, 2025. He was a civil servant in the Operations and Maintenance Division at Fort Riley for 30 years.

Diana L. Tannehill died on August 16, 2025. She was a librarian and teacher, and played the French horn in the Community Pit Orchestra.

Robert V. Viaille '91 died on December 7, 2025. He began his career in the oil fields of West Texas before traveling to Kansas and North Dakota for several years.

Glen A. Warner '59 died on August 11, 2025. He worked as a dairy farmer, hosted several exchange students and was involved at North Branch Friends Church as a Sunday School teacher and church leadership.

Rolland K. Warren '01 died on November 29, 2025. After his retirement from the United States Postal Service, he spent his free time bowling and selling appliances at Home Depot.

Jeffrey D. Webber '96 died on January 10, 2026. He was a senior client partner at Tegria and loved creating lasting memories with his family.

Lewis Wheeler '58 died on May 16, 2025. He was a well-known and respected farmer and a long-time board member for Citizens State Bank in Hugoton.

Kathy G. White '01 & '15 died on September 15, 2025. She was a well-rounded woman who earned multiple degrees, and participated in dance teams and beauty pageants.



Kimberly White '03 & '05 died on August 5, 2025. Previously, she was an Administrative Assistant for Student Affairs for the Dean of the College of Adult and Professional Studies, devoting 30 years to Friends University. She was a passionate reader who loved to spend time sharing stories with her grandchildren and great granddaughter.

Bobbie N. Williams '68 died on November 8, 2025. She met her husband while working as a secretary at Triway Trailer Sales and together had a child, who became her pride and joy.

Fredrick "Fred" Woods '88 died on August 10, 2025. His career includes many occupations, including serving in the U.S. Army, a wheat farmer, an oil truck driver, an orderly at a Winfield hospital, a missile site guard, a math teacher and a lay pastor.

Michele L. Zerk '97 died on December 21, 2025. She worked as a technology project manager in the energy industry and as an executive in the pharmaceutical industry. She was a dedicated and loving mother of two, a cherished wife and a trusted friend to anyone she knew.

Class Notes

1990s

Craig Bay '92 & '96 was named the Chief Operations Officer of Greater Wichita Partnership.

Denise Gash '95 and her family were featured in the Derby Informer for their generational dedication to working at Derby Public Schools.

2000s

Harold Courtois '00 was the recipient of the Kansas Hospital Association 2025 Charles S. Billings Award.

Alvin Leo Sowers, Jr '00 wrote and published an article through the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center discussing the transformative training he provides to the community.

Xavier Whitaker '00 was appointed as Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Talladega College in Alabama.

James Stepien '00 & '09 was named Chief Operating Officer of Via Christi St. Francis.

Brandon Pierce '01 & '04 has accepted the role as Board Chair for the Mid-America All-Indian Museum.

Amanda Borne '03 recently received a Startup Colorado Grant for her calligraphy business, Love Letters by Amanda Calligraphy.

Global Head of Country Music at Amazon Music, **Michelle Kammerer '03**, was included in the music business panel, "Women Who Rock the Industry: Amplifying Women in Music."

Lane Lord '03 was announced as the new head coach of the UT Rio Grande Valley Vaqueros women's basketball team.



Amanda J. (Villarreal) Rodriguez '09 was featured in the Global Finance Herald newsletter discussing her journey to become the Co-Founder and CEO of PLEX Capital.

Patrick C. Woods '03 was appointed as Vice President of ITC Holdings, Corp. and President of ITC Great Plains.

David Lord '04 released a new song "Way Over the Rainbow," a dedication to his Kansas roots and it served as the official announcement to his new album, "Cloud Ear."

Jennifer Sayahnejad '04 was named a Museum Teacher Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Glenna Burden '06 was inducted into the Hutchinson High School's Wall of Honor.

Stacey Hodges '06 was appointed to the Marriage & Family Therapy Advisory Committee of the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board.

Aleks Schaefer '08 was named the Director of the Oklahoma State Master of International Agriculture Program.

Fabian Noel Armendariz '09 & '11 received the Planeta Venus 2025 Community Service Award.

Nina Shaw-Woody '09 was featured on the Kansas Health Foundation blog page representing the Kansas Family Advisory Network.

2010s

Ashley Reynolds '12 was named a Marquis Who's Who Honors for Expertise in Engineering.

Jake Strecker '12 was one recipient of the 2025 Best in Sales, honored by the Wichita Business Journal.

Jeran Landon-Lee Trotter '12 was featured in the Wichita Business Journal for his work as CEO and founder of Next Level Athletes, a workout facility that combines exercise with mental health services.

Walter Disney '13 was featured on the Cleared Hot Podcast to talk about his approach to providing therapy to veterans and first responders.

Karen Hiebert '13 & '15 was named Vice President for Business and Finance at Bethel College.

Alexis Rhodenbaugh '14 & '16 was named Hutchinson Branch Manager at Credit Union of America.

Jeremy Smith '15 received a Wichita Business Journal Young Professionals in Major Companies honor.

Brie Boulanger '15 was inducted into the Kansas Aviation Museum's Board of Directors.

Lisa Paine '16 was featured in the January 2026 Splurge Magazine for her dedication to the Juniper Arts Academy.

2020s

Adjunct faculty at Friends University **Jonathan Hawk '20** was named a Marquis Who's Who Honor for Expertise in the Energy Industry.

Faculty/ Staff/Board Notes

Guest instructor for the Masters of Spiritual Formation and Leadership program, **J.R. Briggs** was featured on the Shifting Culture podcast.

Dr. Stan Harstine's book, "Reading John Through Johannine Lenses," was published on the Bloomsbury's Theology & Religion Online (TARO) platform as part of the Approaches to the Bible collection.

Dr. Ana Jurack-Detter was the recipient of the Kansas Association of Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE) Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education in the PreK-16 Category.

Dr. Amy Lash Esau attended the International College Learning Center Association Conference, where the theme "New Frontiers for Student Success" drove conversations about innovation in tutoring, academic skill-building and student support practices.

Dr. Keas Keasler published "Kingdom Apprenticeship: Dallas Willard's Formational Theology and Missional Vision" in March 2026 with IVP Academic.

Dr. Christian Kettler and his work was honored as the 2025 November volume theme of Participatio publication.

Dr. Shawn Knopp was invited to speak to attendees at the Kansas Association of American Educators state conference.

Dr. Nathanael May presented a piano masterclass to students of Dr. Slawomir Dobrzanski at Kansas State University.

Rev. Dr. Wendy Mohler-Seib was selected for the NetVue Seminar on Vocation in Indianapolis this summer.

Dr. Preston Todd was nominated and selected for recognition in the WBJ's Young Professionals in Major Companies/Employers.

Dr. Paul "Rob" Robert Ramseyer participated in a panel at the Competitive Edge Convening at Wake Forest University to discuss coaching and character development.

Eric Sanford was named the Peer Mentor Coordinator for the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). He is also currently serving as the president of KACRAO, which is the Kansas chapter of AACRAO.



Dr. Lash Esau also enacted the RISE Value of Service, connecting as a future Rotary Club District 5680 Governor to the current Rapid City District Governor in a local food distribution service project.



Ken Spurgeon presented “America 250: Stories from the Revolutionary War” at the Sumner County Historical & Genealogical Society in Wellington.

Dr. James Bryan Smith was named in Ingram’s 2026 class of Icons of Education.

Dr. A.J. Swoboda published “Slow Theology: Eight Practices for Resilient Faith in a Turbulent World” with Baker Publishing Group.

Blaise Webster’s short documentary, “Matt’s Monsters” has received several awards, including the Audience Choice Award in the Kansas Shorts category at the Tallgrass Film Festival, the 2026 Best Documentary Short at the Old Times Not Forgotten Film Festival and

was among the shortlist for Best Documentary at the Bird Watching Film Festival.

Dr. Brent Yoder was invited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to serve on the Advisory Group that is developing the professional development program for peer reviewers at the HLC Annual Conference in March 2026. As a member of the Advisory Group, Yoder co-presented “Different Trails to Climb the Mountain of Student Success” to other peer reviewers during the conference.

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