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Foundation Endows WSU Professorship

By Beccy Tanner

A \$2 million gift to Wichita State University from the Kansas Health Foundation will be used to endow a professorship in communication.

The gift is the largest ever to support faculty at WSU's Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Susan Huxman, director of the college's Elliott School of Communication, said the donation will fund the Kansas Health Foundation's Distinguished Chair of Strategic Communication in the Elliott School.

Huxman said strategic communication involves all aspects of communication—public relations, advertising, organizational and interpersonal communication, and journalism.

The donation qualifies for the Kansas Board of Regents Faculty of Distinction program. Elizabeth King, WSU's vice president for university advancement, said that means the state will supplement the gift.

The combined money will go toward a top-level professor, a research assistant equipment and a Kansas Health Foundation visiting professor lecture series.

Marni Vliet, president and chief executive of the Kansas Health Foundation, said the foundation's goal is to improve public health by improving the communication of health issues.

She cited, for example, an earlier effort by the foundation to encourage smokers to "take it outside" away from children.

That sort of campaign, she said, helps improve the lives and health of Kansans, but the effectiveness depends on an organization's ability to get the word out to the greatest number of people.

"Helping WSU with more resources will help our own work and that of other nonprofits" that conduct information campaigns.

An endowed chair at WSU, she said, guarantees that the grant money will continue to work for years to come to improve health communication in the state.

Huxman said Monday that a national search for the position will begin immediately—with the goal of filling it by next August.