

Last Friday night was payday for those of us who work for Neosho County Community College. Graduation is the most rewarding time. It is such a thrill to see students cross the stage knowing you had a hand in that successful student. Hugs are exchanged between faculty and students. There is always crying and “I couldn’t have done this without you” combined with, “You are going to do great things! Keep in touch!” It is a remarkable night full of tradition, excitement, and a sense of accomplishment for both the graduate and the instructor.

It also marks the end of the academic year, which means it is a good time to look back on everything that has happened in the 2010-2011 college year and celebrate some successes.

There is an old Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.” It sounds nice, doesn’t it? Exciting, eventful, engaging. But in reality it can also be quite stressful. It has been a very interesting year at NCCC. The year started in July with a change in CEO at the College with Dr. Vicky Smith stepping down after seven and a half years as President and the Board of Trustees naming me the new President.

This was an incredibly interesting time for me as my ten year old daughter had yet another cancer scare and another major operation. I negotiated my new president’s contract by cell phone from her hospital room during her recovery. After the operation, she was fine. No cancer! It was a little too interesting that week. Here I was receiving the job that I worked so hard for through a doctoral program, nine years of college teaching, and nine years in different levels of administration – the pinnacle of my professional career - and I would have gladly given that up and gone back to shoveling horse manure (my first job in high school) if it meant my girl would be ok. It really kept things in perspective for me about what was really important in life.

We were off and running at the college with a new fall semester. Then tragedy struck, not once, but many times. We lost a beloved member of the college family, Joe Ward, one of the maintenance team, who passed away just as the fall semester was beginning. Then later that semester we lost three students in separate off-campus accidents. Two of our part-time instructors died. Many of our employees have lost close family members this year as well. Through the tragedy the college pressed on and accomplished many great things.

We opened the new \$8.1 million Ottawa campus on time and on budget to rave reviews. I heard so many positive comments about how this facility has elevated Ottawa and Franklin County. There is a lot to be proud of in the new facility, with the first of its kind Simulation Hospital, the Teaching and Learning Center, and state-of-the-art classrooms. I am so appreciative of everyone on the design team that helped to create this wonderful campus. And we built this campus without any state or local tax money in the budget. Student fees paid for nearly everything, with grants and a few gifts making up the rest. Amazing!

Enrollment went very well in 2010-2011. The College was up about 8.5% in enrollment, led by the online campus which grew about 32% this year! Summer enrollment was up over 14% in 2010 and currently it is up an additional 16% for 2011. It is my belief that the agrarian calendar is going away in higher education as many if not most students now go to class 12 months a year.

This year our baseball team set records in number of wins for the year. Among the numerous awards won by various college athletes, one of our baseball students, Adam Giacalone, was named MVP of the league!

We excelled in welding as well. For the third straight year an NCCC student was the State Welding Champion. Garrett Ross brought home that honor for us.

Our own Randy Kettler was honored with a Region 5 National College Instructional Administrator's Leadership Award this year. And the College honored Marie Gardner, math/computer instructor, and Jon Seibert, computer applications specialist, with the NISOD Award of Excellence. The students chose the maintenance team, and especially Joe Ward, as their NCCC Employees of the Year, which was very touching.

The College met our Kansas Board of Regents Performance Agreements and received 100% funding of new money next year (of course, there is no new money for next year, but it's the thought that counts right? The thought doesn't help pay our utility bills though). We also met all of our Carl Perkins Grant indicators in technical education for things like percentage completion and non-traditional enrollment.

We started a new program at the Ottawa campus in Surgical Technology, a program that will be coming to Chanute in 2012. We are ready to offer the Occupational Therapy Assistant program in 2011-2012 in Ottawa with already over 100 students on a waiting list to get in.

And, most importantly, we had 371 students receive a degree or certificate during this year and 131 students get their GED through three quarters! By the way, the Southeast Kansas Adult Basic Education consortium that NCCC runs has more GED graduates than any other program in the state right now.

Thus completes my first year as President of NCCC. The Board of Trustees has been generous and has offered me a year extension to my contract, for which I am truly grateful. I have been renewed through June 2014. I have loved this job, this Board, the communities of our service area, these employees, and these students. It has been such an honor to lead NCCC.

So it has been very interesting this year at the College, full of high highs and very low lows. Right now, besides teaching an ever-increasing number of students in summer school, we are preparing for another year. We are hiring new personnel, preparing budgets, fixing up the campuses (more on that next month), processing applications, enrolling new students, and getting ready for another interesting year.

As always, I welcome your thoughts and questions at binbody@neosho.edu.