

This October 1st will see the end of a very exciting five years at the College. We will have completed a five-year cycle for our Federal Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant. This \$2 million grant has helped move Neosho County Community College forward in so many ways. When something like this ends, it is a good time to look back and see all that has been accomplished thanks to this shot in the arm from the American taxpayer.

The purpose of the Title III grant was to come up with methods to help colleges and universities across the country grow and improve. Sometimes these grants take the form of improved infrastructure for the institution, sometimes improved student services. We decided to create two new programs with the idea of improving our labs along the way.

I was one of the original authors of the grant, along with an outside grant writing firm that specializes in Title III, and LOTS of help from everyone at the college. Getting a Title III grant is VERY hard as it is highly competitive. We did the best we could on the extensive paperwork and began to hope and pray when it was submitted. I was over the moon when I heard we had gotten it!

I was hoping to add a much needed lab to the original Ottawa campus and maybe update two or three labs at Chanute. Little did I know in 2008 when we finished the grant what would eventually happen and how it would forever change NCCC.

The grant became seed money to move a lot of other initiatives of the college forward. The Board of Trustees were preparing to increase the size of the Ottawa campus, but with the Title III grant came a little extra money to do that, and the deadlines required that went with it. The grant helped push the Ottawa campus forward, and when construction prices fell, it was clear that a new structure was the best course of action. The Trustees had saved up a significant amount of money from student fees paid by college students at the Ottawa campus and used those to pay for the majority of this new building. When that \$7.62 million building was completed enrollment shot up 22% over the same date the year before. Interestingly, we also saw a rapid rise in online enrollment from those in the Franklin, Anderson and Douglas County area. It seemed the beautiful new building “legitimized” our college in the northern service area. In fact, the most heard comment from the students the week we opened in March of 2010 was “It feels like a real college now.” Keep in mind we had the same instructors, the same curriculum, and the same administration and staff. It was the new building that gave them a sense of quality about their college education. And what got it moving was the Title III grant.

The grant also called for two new programs to be created – Occupational Therapy Assistant and Surgical Technology. Here we had a lot of help from the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) to get these programs approved. We achieved the specific outside accreditation for these areas and to date have had 140 students in these programs (81 students have been in the Surg Tech program and 60 students have been admitted to the OTA program). Those students are getting good paying jobs and helping increase the quality of life for their patients.

On the Chanute campus I was hoping to use the grant to give a much needed facelift to our three 1968 vintage science labs, but the Trustees decided to take this a wonderful step further! They used the Title III funds along with moneys from donations and from student fees to completely renovate the three labs in question. They went beyond that to create a fourth lab, a human cadaver lab, one of only four in the state at the community college level and the only one in Southeast Kansas. The labs were “taken down to studs” and rebuilt. Thanks entirely to donations, we were even able to add an animal display area for

all of the various specimens that the College cares for including several snakes, a tortoise, a hedgehog and hissing cockroaches.

On October 9th at 5:00pm I would like to invite you to the Chanute campus for our Open House to see the finished product. I think you will be impressed! No, you don't have to see the cadavers if you don't want to.

We also wrote in the grant a matching option where we can put up to \$295,000 plus dollar for dollar matching funds of the grant into the college's foundation IF the foundation could match those dollars. The interest from that deposit could then be used to strengthen the institution even further. Well, the foundation got to work and was able to meet that obligation. So we now have \$612,000 as of the end of August (\$590,000 plus interest) in our Title III account to keep the programs going in the future.

Recently we were visited by a Title III grant investigator whose job it was to make sure your federal dollars are properly spent and that the grants achieved the results predicted. After reviewing our records and spending a few days with our staff he issued his opinion. I have not yet received his final report, but he stated that our grant execution should serve as a model for other colleges and universities in the country. I think he was impressed with all we have done.

Obviously the \$2 million grant did not pay for all of the advancements above but it was the tipping point to get us moving in the right direction to greatly improve NCCC at a rapid rate. I will be forever grateful to all of the employees that helped write the grant as well as Ramona Munsell and Associates, our contracted grant writers, who helped get this in the first place. But mostly I want to thank our Board of Trustees who had the vision to use Title III as a jumping off point to remake our college into a new stronger NCCC.

We have to "lay out" one year before we submit our next competitive grant request, but I can't wait for the next cycle. Seeing what we accomplished with the last grant makes me very excited for the future!

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