

It was quite a spring break for the Inbody family this year. My youngest daughter, Alayna, married Chandler Finuf, her high school boyfriend. There was not a dry eye in the house. It was a beautiful, albeit a bit different, wedding and reception (more on that later). Then my other daughter, Abrielle and her new husband bought their first house. So, we helped them paint, fix things, and then move to their new home in Wichita. It was not a very relaxing week off from normal college operations, but it was eventful!

Back to Alayna's wedding, it was a departure from her older sister's affair just 11 months ago. That's right. If you're keeping score, Brian and Jen put on two weddings in 11 months. I have heard worse horror stories of just two or three months apart on daughters' weddings, but 11 is still pretty quick! Having those weddings so close together the choices my daughters made and the contrast between the events stick out.

Abrielle's wedding last April (April Fool's Day if you recall) was a very pretty event at the Botanical Gardens in Wichita. It was Tulip Fest there and quite beautiful. She had the overall theme inspired by the movie Disney/Pixar movie "Up," with the motto "Adventure is Out There!" The wedding had a dollhouse suspended by balloons, and cute quotes from the movie in the vows, including, "Cross your heart, because we're in a club now." My concerns were unwarranted as the wedding was great, tasteful, and meaningful. Yes, I cried. In fact, I'm tearing up as I type this.

Then it was time for Alayna to shape her wedding and make it special. What was the theme you ask? Star Wars. There were light sabers, out-of-this-world drinks, "Anakin Grilled Chicken" (for those of you who know what happens to Anakin at the end of the prequels, that a good dark joke) and live Stormtroopers to take pictures with. At the end of the ceremony instead of "You may now kiss the bride," the officiant paraphrased Han Solo in Empire Strikes Back and said, "Alayna, you could use a good kiss!" It was a lot of fun! I still cried.

So here are two girls, now women, raised in the same household, with the same parents, ending up with very different ideas on their weddings. While both were movie-themed (okay, we watched too many movies with the girls growing up), they were very different affairs. And both equally wonderful, perfect events for them.

Like a movie, as the Executive Producer of the wedding (writers and directors shape the creative content, the Executive Producer just pays for it), I wanted the girls to have the weddings of their dreams, within a budget of course. I wanted to provide the resources that allowed them to have a successful event, one that would exceed their expectations. I think that happened both times.

People are different, with different likes and different needs. It's best if there are choices so that they can find the right thing that speaks to them. Weddings used to be incredibly similar. The organ played, "Here Comes the Bride," there was a unity candle, a song or two, the standard never-changing vows, a kiss, then the same recessional song as the couple left. Now more and more people make it their own and make it special to them. Choices can be important, personal, and meaningful.

At Neosho County Community College, we try to provide choices as well. You've heard me talk about the many programs that we offer and continue to expand. In the fall we will add Automotive Technology to our ever-growing list of program choices.

We also have a lot of choices of classes within degrees to choose from. While there are some classes that everyone who is getting an Associate of Arts or Science degree has to take, there are also categories of classes that meet the requirements. Students have to take a few humanities classes, but they can choose art, music, theatre, literature, etc. There are many options that perhaps speaks to them.

But we even have choices in modalities for most of those classes. What do I mean by modality? This is the method by which the class is taught. In the past, classes were all taught the same way. Much like the standard wedding, we had standard classes in Higher Education for hundreds of years. It was a 16-week class, meeting for three hours a week, with an instructor, in-class lectures and tests, and out-of-class readings, projects and papers. And many of our classes still basically follow this structure, with some new technology added to make it easier for the student and the instructor.

But what if this is not the best structure for the student? What if the schedule of classes doesn't work for them, or they prefer learning at a different pace? What if they could be more successful working on their own time?

Today, there are many other modalities available to the student. They can take the class online, and while there is a required schedule in the course, the student can work anytime in the week to complete the assignments. They can take live Zoom classes where the instructor is still lecturing and talking to them like in a traditional class, however the class is offered through live interactive teleconferencing. So, the student can watch the class from home. And they can take a hybrid class, one that combines several of these modalities. For instance, instead of meeting three times a week for an hour, they only meet once a week, and complete the rest of the week online.

The Online Campus of NCCC did not exist when I got to the college in 2003. It has now grown to be the second largest campus behind the Chanute campus in terms of enrollment. And it continues to grow! Our online and hybrid classes are up 16.7% in enrollment over last year. More and more students are choosing these classes. Still, when you add all of the classes taught in a face-to-face classroom at our various campuses, the traditional course is still our number one modality. But it's great to give students choices!

My girls are married, and the weddings are over. It will be nice to talk about something else besides table settings and flowers for a change. It is so awesome to see my girls grow up to become such wonderful women, and to expand our family with two fantastic sons-in-law. They may be two different people, making different choices, but they keep making the right ones for themselves and their future happiness. As a parent, that's all you can hope for.

If you have any questions about this column, need advice on producing a wedding, or where to find discount light sabers, email me at binbody@neosho.edu.