

If it's May then it's once again graduation! What an exciting and frightening time for our students. They are excited for what they have accomplished and that maybe homework is over for a while. And many are frightened about leaving a place that they have just now gotten familiar with and entering something much larger. Whether it is off to a university with its thousands of students or off to the full-time working world, it is a big change.

You might be surprised to learn that NCCC has three graduations every May, not just one. First, we have the standard graduation that probably springs to mind, with its formal speeches and students crossing the stage getting a degree cover. Trade secret here – the degree cover is empty. The real diploma arrives in the mail a few weeks later after spring grades are turned in and we check to make sure the student has met all the requirements. We allow students to “walk” at graduation if they are within a few credit hours of completion. Often the student enrolls in summer school to finish up.

If you come to graduation you'll see me do something I hardly every do – stay on script. Usually I speak off the cuff at meetings and for speeches, but for graduation I deliver a written speech. Those of you who know me well know that this is very hard for me! I like to speak in a conversational style and being kept to a script, well, to quote Dirty Dancing, “Nobody puts Baby in a corner.” Only they do and I stick to the script.

I do have a wonderful, powerful line in the script – “By the authority vested in me by the Kansas Board of Regents and the Trustees of Neosho County Community College I hereby confer and award the appropriate associate degree or certificate for which each student is qualified.” And just like that students become graduates and alumni. It's almost like magic, except the magic involves possibly years of work by the student, lots of resources, and an army of people teaching and supporting that student to make it happen. But still, it's [an](#) awesome thing to say and worth staying on script for.

This year after those final checks are over we expect to grant about 830 degrees and certificates! That's not bad when you consider that NCCC has about 3,000 students total. That's a large group of our student body completing their programs! That's why my hand was tired from shaking so many students' hands as they crossed the stage. This year was special as we had our first group of Heating, Air Conditioning and Ventilation (HVAC) graduates cross the stage from our new program!

The second graduation we conduct is nurses pinning. Nurses pinning is a bit like regular graduation except that [it](#) is even more formal. As each student, excuse me - graduate, crosses the stage the announcer reads a statement that the student prepared often thanking the people in his/her lives who helped them through the program and the student's plan for the future. Instead of a degree cover, the nurse receives a nursing pin, pinned on their outfit by one of our nursing instructors, a tradition that is nearly as old as nursing. And we have a lot of graduates! NCCC runs the largest two-year nursing program in Kansas right now, and one of the most successful, receiving some of the highest marks from our accreditors.

Lastly, is my favorite graduation in many ways – ABE graduation. These are the students who have completed the requirements for a State of Kansas High School Diploma by passing the ABE test. I can tell you that the test is very difficult. Let's just say that if all high schools in the state required the seniors to pass the GED before they graduate we would have a significant reduction in high school completion. If nurses pinning is the most formal, ABE graduation is on the other extreme.

It is a very informal, relaxed graduation with students who may or may not have dressed up for the occasion. The speeches are not great works of oration, but often very meaningful as graduates tell of the struggles they have had and the successes they have now become thanks to the program. It is usually very moving to see people who thought they could not learn or accomplish much in life complete this program, stand up for themselves, and yearn for more education. A large percentage of our GED completers go on to take college courses. It is at this last graduation that I remember what our mission is, "to enrich our communities and our students' lives." I know that this group of people that many had given up on are now on their way to being productive citizens with a real shot at a higher standard of life for themselves and their families.

So it is graduation season, a time of excitement and new beginnings for graduation. For me and the employees of NCCC it is a time of true fulfillment. Now, by the power vested in me by the academic calendar, have a great summer!