

I used to be a college instructor, almost 20 years ago now, and I recently had a former student of mine contact me through Facebook. His name was Harold and he wanted to thank me. I remember him as a good kid, a bit too jovial and laissez-fair for my taste as he often joked around when it was time to work in lab. He had a lax attitude toward assignments and tests in my classes too. I liked him, I really did, but he just wasn't taking his major too seriously and his work showed it.

In his Facebook message Harold asked me if I remembered him (of course I did), and he asked if I recalled one particular conversation I had with him. This was probably 24 years ago, so no, I had forgotten any noteworthy conversations. He said, "You sat me down and told me I had a lot of potential, but that I was wasting it. You said that I should pull my head out of another part of my anatomy, and get serious about learning, and about being a successful student, because you could see me accomplishing great things in life, or not. But right now it was looking like not."

In my youth I was not as diplomatic as I have become as President, so it is altogether possible that I did say those blunt words to him, in order to make a point that would be remembered by a young student.

Harold did listen and he did focus his efforts to finish his degrees. He wanted me to know that he has gone on to be a teacher himself, inspiring hundreds of other students over his career thus far, specializing in those students who need to pull their heads out of parts of their anatomies. Harold credited our conversation with his turn-around as a student. He wanted to say thank you for caring enough about him to have that difficult, somewhat crass, conversation, because not only did he benefit, but every student he has connected with has benefited too.

Wow. I was overwhelmed. I realized that by touching one person at the right time in the right way, you can have such a huge impact on so many others.

At Neosho County Community College we know that we are impacting individual lives for the better, helping people with their educational goals. Completing those educational goals often help them attain ultimate goals, such as a good paying job in a field that they would enjoy. We can see that outcome of our work every graduation day. But it is harder to determine what effect we are having as a college beyond those individual goals and the difference we are making one student at a time.

We have a mission statement of "enriching our communities and our students' lives." So we know we are enriching the lives of students through their individual accomplishments while in college and beyond. But are we actually enriching our communities? We can surmise that we are doing that though helping our students but what about to our communities in general? What proof do we have that we are accomplishing the "enriching our communities" aspect of the mission?

To that end every seven years or so we bring in a group of economists to study the available data from a variety of sources to see what, if any, economic impact NCCC is having to the region that we serve. The full report as well as a shortened Executive Summary is available on our webpage at www.neosho.edu/emsj.aspx.

The results are quite impressive. Between what dollars the college brings in directly through local, state, and federal support, what the students spend, and what the alumni of NCCC spend, NCCC supports about 857 jobs in the region each year! That amounts to annual impact of \$30 million! About one out of every 41 jobs in the region can be linked back to NCCC, according to the study.

For every dollar a student spends on their NCCC education the economists estimate that they get \$4 in returned lifetime earnings. That's about a 16.2% rate of return which is much higher than what you would get in the stock market. For every dollar that a taxpayer gives to NCCC, that dollar earns about \$1.80 in additional tax revenue. How? When you help someone get a degree or certificate through taxation, they in turn get a better higher paying job which results in, you guessed it, more tax dollars generated.

The area benefits in other ways too. Each dollar we spend in accomplishing our mission results in \$5.40 in societal savings. When folks get a good job through a better education they get themselves off government assistance, are less likely to be incarcerated, less likely to need state or federal-assisted medical care, and more like to send their kids to college, thus breaking generational poverty for that family. I have often heard, "You can pay for education or you can pay for incarceration, it's your choice. But either way – you're paying." According to the economists, the cost to educate someone is about 1/5th the cost to society than not educating them in our area.

When I get overwhelmed with problems at work, and believe me I do, I often think of Harold and the small difference I was able to make in his life. According to him, that short conversation helped get him moving in the right direction, which, now in turn, has helped so many others – people I will probably never meet. But I know I helped make a difference on a larger scale than I imagined at the time.

When you help NCCC accomplish its mission of enriching our communities and our students' lives through your support you too are casting a stone in the water sending positive ripples in every direction. You may not know where all those ripples go, but you are making the area and beyond a better place. I hope you agree that our area is better off having Neosho County Community College here for the past 84 years. You have made a difference not only in substantial economic impact, but the lives you have helped improve one student at a time.

If you have any questions about this article or anything else, please feel free to contact me at binbody@neosho.edu