

Ah...I can almost smell the turkey and dressing! This year we are off to my Mom's house for the traditional meal, then over to my Dad's for a fish fry that evening. The next day will be spent eating a diet bar while walking on the treadmill, unfortunately. Consequences can be painful sometimes. Still it will be great to see my family and take a little stock in my life for the things I am thankful for. It's a time to think about your current situation but also to think about the future.

Thanksgiving, as most of you no doubt know, got its start in the United States as a harvest festival in 1621 when the Mayflower colonists had their first successful corn crop. The previous winter had seen half of the ship's passengers die from exposure and disease. Now, thanks in large part to Squanto, a member of the Pawtuxet tribe, the settlers had learned to cultivate the land and had a much better chance to survive the winter. They had a three-day celebration of food thanks to the harvest and to a successful hunt. The holiday was one to give thanks for the crop, but also thanks for a future that was more secure.

Nowadays Thanksgiving is just one day, but we eat enough for three. Most of us take stock in our lives and what we have come through, much as the Pilgrims no doubt did nearly 400 years ago. Ok, maybe we don't have to fear scurvy and exposure as much as they did, but the tradition of reflection and thanksgiving is still alive and well today. But the holiday was also about the relief and excitement of securing the Pilgrims' future. I propose that we spend time thinking about both the past and the future this Thanksgiving. Simply put, instead of just saying what you are thankful for this year, think about what you would like to say you are thankful for NEXT year. Have you done the thing you always have wanted to do?

At NCCC we have been asking students to think about their future specifically. Recently we have hung up a large chalkboard outside the Student Union where we ask our students to complete this statement: Before I die I want to\_\_\_\_\_. There are many lines for many different comments from participants. Our history club went on a trip to New Orleans and saw a wall like this there, then brought the idea back to create one here. There will be a wall like it in Ottawa this spring.

"Before I Die" is part of an international movement created by Candy Chang, a New Orleans artist. She put the first chalkboard wall on the side of an abandoned house in response to losing someone she loved. The idea caught on and now there are more than 525 similar walls in over 70 countries. You can see all of the walls at [www.beforeidie.cc](http://www.beforeidie.cc).

The statements on the NCCC wall have been very interesting ranging from the poignant, to the heartbreaking, to the hopeful, to the silly (and yes, occasionally the pornographic – luckily it is in chalk and easily erased). Many of the comments are work-related goals, many are about family or relationships. Most are about quality of life and future accomplishments. We constantly ask our students to think about the future, to see how the work they are doing now in college will help them get to the future they desire.

Educational attainment is directly correlated to so many positive quality of life issues, including better health, better household income, longer life, and a chance to find and hold a job, even in bad times.

Going to college and completing a certificate or degree can both directly and indirectly help students achieve what they wrote on that wall.

The economic downturn has slowed many people in accomplishing those life goals. Those who have a job have held on to it with both hands. They may hate their position, but at least they had a job in unsure times. Now, things are starting to improve in the state. More and more are coming to the college looking for training for their next position and a way to a job that brings them both a paycheck and happiness. They want to be fulfilled at work, not just survive.

Those on the Mayflower did not come to survive, but to build new lives and new futures. It took courage, risk, and a lot of hard work, but they made a better life for themselves and their children.

So this Thanksgiving besides thinking of the past, consider your future. I invite you to write your own response to the statement "Before I die I want to." There may be ways that NCCC can help you fill in that blank and move forward with your life. And you know it is never too late. As an example, we had a woman in her 60s finish her nursing degree just recently. It was something she always wanted to do before she died and now she is a practicing nurse.

Folks that thought they didn't have the time or resources to get a degree have been pleasantly surprised at all of the options and support the college provides to its many students. Night and online classes and financial aid is here as are caring, motivated, and knowledgeable instructors that can help you get where you want to be. They will be your own personal Squanto. Give us a call and we can help you get started on finishing that goal.

So, what do you want to be thankful for next Thanksgiving? What do you want to do before you die?

As always I am thankful for your thoughts and comments at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu)