

I dropped my oldest child off at Friends University this semester. On the way home in the car there was some pretty pathetic crying, openly weeping, etc. It was brutal. Oh, and her mother cried some too. It was a harsh reality of life that, although one never stops being a parent, everyday parenting had ended for us with Abrielle. Even though we are only a phone call, text, or car ride away, we would not be seeing each other as much as before when she lived at home, and may never see each other that much again.

Of course, she could come back home, either through dropping out or completion of her degree and not finding a job. The more successful she is the more likely it is that our everyday relationship with her would be over. This led me to a realization - One definition of a successful parent is to put themselves out of a job - to raise someone that no longer needs you. Sure, maybe they need you in the emotional support way, but not in the "physically support me every day" sense. Success as measured by separation, it's a harsh, somewhat final lesson of everyday parenting.

Abrielle knows though, that wherever she goes we will be there for her, that we will always be around to support her. But besides family there has been another group of people that have supported her, encouraged her, and helped her on her path to adulthood. It's that important group of people who have come to mind this Thanksgiving season.

Every year we ask students what about their experience at Neosho County Community College were they most satisfied with. We do so to see what is going well and what needs to be strengthened. Among the very top of the list (84% say anyway) is not the wonderful facilities, great activities, or the very handsome college president (I may have added one of those choices).

It's the faculty.

I'm pretty sure that you can think back in your life about one or more teachers or professors that truly have made a difference. Perhaps they encouraged you to keep going when you wanted to quit. Or maybe they said you should think about a particular career choice. Maybe they gave you a well-timed figurative, "kick in the pants" that helped put you back on the right track.

In high school I had Rose Scanlon, my English teacher who helped me learn to read with a critical eye, while crafting my own voice as a writer. Dr. Bill Rugg, picked me out of a class and made me the TV studio director, running the lab - he also applied the occasional "kick in the pants" when I needed it. I had Dr. Charles Fletcher, Professor of Mass Communication at Oklahoma State University who told me that I would make a fantastic college instructor. And Dr. Jim Hammons at the University of Arkansas who said to me, "You're going to be college president someday."

The instructors and professors of NCCC serve that same function – teacher, mentor, counselor, encourager, and the occasional consequence bringer. And our students recognize that. Students say that instructors always find the time to help them. They listen when the student needs them to. Faculty encourage them to keep going. They inspire them to look into various career paths when they see potential. They work long hours and put a part of themselves in everything they do.

In a word – they care. They care if a student is not in class, or if they suddenly do poorly on an assignment, so they call to see what is going on. They are just as excited as the student is, maybe more so, when they see them accomplish something that was a struggle. As an instructor for nine years I can

tell you that there is no bigger thrill than to see the light bulb go on when a student gets something, or the pride in their faces when they complete a difficult task. It's an amazing feeling!

Then comes the end. The faculty cry at graduation because they are proud of the growth they have seen in the students and of what they have accomplished by earning the certificate or degree – and they cry because they are going to miss them. Instructors become attached to students, somewhat in the way parents do, albeit different, and the parting hurts a bit too. It is not a job, it is a calling and it shows.

So we parents cry when we drop the kids off at their higher education institution, and the professors cry when they graduate and move on. Much like the parents, the instructor has put themselves out of a job, passing on the knowledge, skills and abilities to help the student be successful in life. It's part of the cycle of parenting and of being an educator. Parents eventually run out of kids to drop off at college, but for educators, the cycle continues year after year. It's a true bitter-sweet part of the job.

During her last weeks at Neosho, before she transferred to Friends University, Abrielle took thank you notes around to some special professors who made a difference in her life. She did that on her own by the way, I was quite surprised when she said she was doing that. I know that the faculty who got the notes were touched. Not many students take the time to say thank you (I guess Jennifer raised a good kid there).

So for all of those students who didn't take the time to say thank you, this is for you. Faculty, teachers, instructors, professors, in this annual time of gratitude, please allow me to publicly thank you for all you have done and continue to do for students, not just the faculty of NCCC, who are the heart and soul of our college, but for all teachers reading this. If you care then chances are you are making a difference in students' lives. We, your students, are forever grateful.

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