

As the song goes, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!" And I agree wholeheartedly. My girls are getting a bit older now, 11 and 13, and the presents under the tree are changing. There's a lot less Toys R Us and a lot more Rue 21. The girl's Christmas lists are getting shorter and much more expensive and specific. I don't mind because while I'll miss the "some assembly required" parties that Jennifer and I would have on late night Christmas Eve, it is just wonderfully amazing to watch them grow up into fine young women.

This is the time of year we count our blessings, help those that we can, and celebrate life. Recently we did some celebrating at NCCC.

We give the gift of education, and thereby, a gift of a possible new life every semester at NCCC. This last Saturday was a double graduation. We "pinned" over 100 new nurses who completed the Ottawa program (thanks Ottawa University for letting us use your wonderful Chapel!). The nurses receive a graduation pin, as is the tradition in that profession. We also graduated several dozen GED students who are now proud owners of a State of Kansas High School Diploma.

At nursing graduation I saw a son who had his AAS from NCCC years ago "pin" his Mom who just earned her degree that day. At the GED graduation another mother and son graduated together, helping each other through the program. If you don't get misty-eyed watching that, there is something wrong with you.

This is the gift education can bring – a chance for a better life, a rewarding career, and a way out of poverty for many of our students and their young families. Sometimes I feel I have the greatest job on Earth, (except when I'm dealing with the State or the Feds, then maybe not so much. But days like last Saturday make it all worth it!)

We must have been good this year because our gifts just kept on coming.

Last month I told you that we entered the College in the National Community College Benchmarking program run through Johnson County Community College. We wanted to see how we fared against nearly 300 other community colleges in the US in many different aspects. The results gave us a few things to work on, but we were overwhelmed with the number of items that we scored in their highest category – the top 15% of colleges. In eleven areas we scored head and shoulders above many other schools in the study. Here are just a few of those areas where NCCC excelled:

- Student completion and transfer,
- Retention of students,
- Success in core academic skills,
- Online course completion and success rates,
- Developmental math success,
- Student satisfaction in safety and security
- Student/Professional Student Services Staff Ratio

Wow! Now that is a present I was not expecting! I am very proud of all of the scores, especially the scores in retention of students (which reflects our low dropout rate) and student completion and transfer. I mentioned those last month in my column. I wanted to show you the other areas in which the College excelled.

I could not be happier about the success of our students in the core academic skill classes which is made up of classes such as English Composition I, Speech and College Algebra. This is further proof that our efforts to improve our general education attainment is working.

Likewise I knew our Panthers were doing well in our online classes, but I did not expect that our online class pass rate would put us in the top success category!

We have long focused on safety and security at NCCC, and our students noticed, putting us among the elite schools in the study for our efforts to keep them safe. To that end I want to remind everyone again that NCCC along with Neosho County Emergency Management and all of the area first responders will be holding an active shooter simulation at the College on January 7th at 10am. Please do not come on campus to watch. The first responders take this exercise very seriously and they do not want anyone not involved with the simulation to be here. I'm letting you know about it because we just don't want folks to panic if they hear rumors about some tragic event at NCCC. It is a simulation to help not only the College but the first responders with fine tuning their procedures in case something awful like this were actually to occur around here.

The results for the study were a wonderful gift, but a gift we earn every day through hard work, and tough love for our students. I want to publicly congratulate our fulltime and part-time faculty on these results, as well as our entire student development and student support areas and every other area of the College. Well done! You have earned your holiday break!

So from my house – Brian, Jennifer, Abrielle, and Alayna, and from the whole Neosho County Community College family to you and yours – Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to write me at binbody@neosho.edu.