

I really miss teaching sometimes. For nine years I was a fulltime mass communication instructor at NEO A&M College in Miami, Oklahoma. I loved that job in many ways, mostly because of the interactions I would have with the students. I loved watching them arrive a little scared and excited about being in college in the first place. Over time they would gain confidence through developing the skills that I would teach them until a few years later they would leave me ready to move on to a big university or go straight into the industry.

While they were with me I learned about them and where they came from. I would see them fail and try again. I would be just as excited to show them the grade of "A" they had earned as they were to receive it. I formed a broadcasting club and the students and I would take tours of broadcast facilities in the area, meet at my house for club meetings and home cooked meals, and work on club projects together like planning the live production of the homecoming parade.

It was a magical time in my life. I was newly married without kids yet. I didn't have to worry about hundreds of employees and thousands of students then or of all of the constituency groups that have to be appeased, like the US Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, Kansas Board of Regents, etc. It was about only two things back then - learning and the interaction with my students.

I have always believed that the interaction between instructor and student is the most important thing that we offer as a college. I tell all of my employees that the student/instructor relationship is the center of our college solar system to which all other functions orbit. The purpose of all of the other departments of the college is to support and strengthen that interaction.

Why do we have great labs, classrooms and faculty offices? To provide a great environment for that interaction. Why do we pay for faculty sponsored clubs? To provide more opportunities for that interaction. Why do we have online course portals and robust messaging systems? To provide more channels of communication for that interaction. You get the idea.

Why does Neosho County Community College put so much emphasis on that Faculty/Student relationship? It is the source of our success. And strengthening that interaction is the solution to many of the issues facing colleges and universities today.

Studies show that students who report a positive interaction with their faculty members learn more than students who do not have that positive relationship. They miss class less often, turn in the required work and give the instructor higher satisfaction ratings on course evaluations. Minority students specifically respond the best to positive student/instructor interaction.

But it goes beyond learning into retention of the student and completion. On surveys of students who complete a degree often when asked why they were able to complete the degree they cite the name of a particular faculty member. When asked why they chose a particular major or field of study, students remember a conversation and encouragement from faculty in that area. That's powerful data!

Instructors that go beyond "lecture, test and grade" and put their whole self into their teaching, who truly care about the student and what they are learning have a direct measurable impact on both learning and completion.

Lecture-test-grade is a one-way, one at a time, poor interaction model in which the instructor does 99% of the talking with maybe a few questions, then the students answer with completion of an exam or paper. Yawn. Why not just take the class by correspondence?

I remind our instructors that this is the immediate feedback generation. They all post things daily, sometimes hourly, on social media – why? They want “likes” and comments – constant immediate feedback. They need it. An instructor who lectures, responds to a few questions, then marks their papers only with a single letter of the alphabet is not giving them what they want and need – significant feedback.

Right now we have new teaching methods like “flipped classroom” and “guide on the side” which are just fancy new ways to encourage two-way interaction between instructor and students, trying to get more and more instructors to stop just lecturing and start interacting with students.

But a positive relationship goes beyond the classroom. One study asked students to list the most meaningful thing they did in college. Not surprisingly, staring at the back of an instructor’s head while he wrote on, and lectured to, the chalkboard did not make the list.

What was at the top of the list? It was an off-campus interaction with the instructor – the time the instructor took the class to the river to gather water samples, or to an art gallery so that they could see a master painter’s work with their own eyes. It is important the faculty expand their interaction with students beyond the classroom and office to the outside world. Here is where they make college the most memorable and the most impactful on our students.

In talking with our alumni here NCCC, people tell me about instructors like Martha Stoltz who pushed them harder to learn, or Mary Louise Barber who made her classes interesting and fun. Or Jim Carlson who was patient and understanding when the concepts were difficult to understand. The list goes on and on.

I’ll bet you can think back to a faculty member that pushed you, or inspired you, or encouraged you in order to help you through college and be the person you are today. I sure can.

NCCC has had the highest KBOR Student Success Index for three years running (this year we are second – but we are going to bring that back up to #1!). That’s a measurement of the students who either transfer to university successfully or who graduate from NCCC. We are very proud of that accomplishment and I know why we got there – our premier instructor/student interaction that has been a part of our college for its entire history.

Thanks go to the faculty for this – their time and energy spend caring for the student make this possible. Thanks also to all of those services that orbit that student/faculty relationship and support it to make it the best it can be.

I gave up that daily interaction with students to become an administrator. I thought I could make a bigger impact on more students and support that interaction on a different scale. I think I am doing that now. I get to watch it happening on a college-wide scale, not just individually, which is awesome. But from time to time, I sure miss teaching.

If you have any comment or question about this article or anything else feel free to contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).