

Is safety an absolute or a feeling? When my daughters were younger it amazed me how their rooms, which they loved and felt comfortable in during the day, would suddenly morph to horrific, terrifying places at night. Parents know the drill of reassuring them, making sure they don't watch anything on TV in the evening that might give them nightmares, closing closet doors, etc.

Were they safe at night? – Of course. Jen and I were there. We have a big dog and a big gun as well as a security system, deadbolts, outside lighting, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and on and on. So they were safe. But they often didn't feel safe without a night light, the door ajar, stuffed animals in the bed, hallway lights, etc.

The girls were as safe as we could reasonably make them, but sometimes they didn't feel that way during certain parts of the day. I can control the safety level of my house by adding motion sensors for instance, but I could not control how my girls felt. Only they could. What I could do is provide an atmosphere where that was an easy choice, to feel safe.

Safety on campus has been thrust onto center stage due to shootings at public locations and recent legislative action (more on that later). Safety at NCCC is always a primary concern of mine for many different reasons – chief among them – if you feel unsafe you will not be able to learn.

That is from a psychological theory called Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. Basically it states that you must look to someone's needs in this order – physical needs (food, shelter) ahead of safety, ahead of love/belonging, in front of self-esteem, before you can get to the pinnacle of existence – self-actualization or fully becoming the person you have the potential to be. In the simplest terms, we cannot teach someone math who is thinking about a pulled pork sandwich because he or she is so hungry.

(Wow, my mouth just watered when I wrote "pulled pork sandwich." That's B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning by the way. Back to Maslow now.)

Likewise we cannot effectively teach someone who is worried about being safe when they are on campus. It is nearly impossible to concentrate on the material if you are concerned about a tornado warning, a fire, or, God forbid, an active shooter.

Neosho County Community College has been very much involved with improving campus safety, as you may have read in this column in the past. We are moving through the Chanute campus installing sprinkler systems in the older buildings (Ottawa already has that). We are adding more cameras, more emergency alert beacons, and improving campus lighting. We have linked our emergency alert system to our Facebook page (Neosho County Community College) and our Twitter feed (@NCCC) so we can keep people informed during a crisis. This new notification is on top of our Panther TextNet that sends text messages to all of our students simultaneously as well as campus email. You may recall that NOAA has recognized NCCC as one of the very few community colleges in the nation as "Storm Ready," a distinction that we are

very proud of. In January we are participating in a full-scale active shooter scenario on the Chanute campus involving all aspects of Neosho County Emergency Management – police, fire, hospital, etc. The College has already completed a full scale tornado simulation as well. We take safety very seriously.

Now we have a new safety issue to consider, whether to allow those with a conceal/carry license to carry their guns inside campus buildings. This past legislative session the State of Kansas passed HB 2052 which lifted the ban from carrying concealed weapons into state buildings including public schools, municipal facilities and, of course, college and university buildings. The law is quite long and I don't mean to over simplify it in this short column. I would suggest going to the Legislative website and reading it for yourself. It does allow for colleges to not allow conceal/carry in the buildings if there are "adequate safety measures" in place such as staffed metal detectors at all public entrances.

Within the law there is a provision that allows colleges like NCCC to apply for up to a four-year extension from allowing guns within the buildings while we create a security plan. In the plan we would consider whether or not to place metal detectors and guards at entrances or just allow the guns in the buildings. NCCC did apply for this extension which could run until June 2017.

Other issues that the Board wishes to consider as part of the security plan include if college employees are allowed to carry guns, and if so, which employees should and should not. We will also be looking into the possibility of providing armed security (currently we provide a security force that does NOT carry guns). There are significant concerns about how all of this will affect the College's insurance policy and certainly the budget.

This is where I need your help. As part of our due diligence on the security plan, we are conducting a survey of students, the community and the employees to get their thoughts on safety at NCCC and on the gun issues specifically. If you have a moment, please go to www.neosho.edu/survey.aspx and complete a short survey about how you feel about safety at NCCC. Students and employees will be filling out a separate but similar survey as well. We'll be looking at the data from the Center for Disease Control and the Clery report on nationwide campus crime. We will benchmark with other colleges and universities our size to see what they are doing on this issue as well as following the advice from the FBI and our local law enforcement.

My girls are older now and monsters no longer live under the bed. As pre-teens and teens safety for them now revolves around their own decision-making skills. And sometimes that makes me feel scared day or night. I prefer the monsters.

If you have any thoughts or questions about this column or anything else please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.