

It is here again! Another fall semester is starting on Monday the 22nd. Personally this is a bit of a milestone for me – it's my 14th year at NCCC, my 7th as its president, but my 25th year in higher education. More important than that, my oldest daughter is now a Panther! She is taking college classes while in high school at Chanute High.

On Saturday the 20th our residence halls will house nearly 300 students on the Chanute campus. It is the stereotypical image of students, moms, dads and little brothers/sisters helping to carry in boxes, and clothes and electronics into the halls. There are tears, of course (mostly from Mom), goodbyes and the new adventure starts.

But that image only tells about 10% of the story. NCCC will have about 3,100 students this year so only about 10% are part of the live-on-campus student stereotype. Our average age is not 19, like the people moving in the halls, but 26. That's higher than the universities' average student age even with their four-year programs and graduate schools.

How can that be? As you may already know, we also have a large number of students that are still in high school. Students can knock out a year or more of their college education before they even finish high school. These classes are called "concurrent" in that the students are getting credit for these courses both as a college class and as a high school course concurrently. They save a lot of time and money for the student and their families as NCCC charges a great deal less than universities for the same classes. And if you can save \$30,000 a year or more at university, then that is a good deal for everyone. Up to about 21% of our enrollment comes from these concurrent students and that means a lot of 16, 17, and 18 year olds bringing DOWN the average. So how is it 26?

Because, along with those first-time fulltime traditional freshmen, as we call them here, and all of those concurrent students we have a large number of nontraditional students starting this week – students that are in their 20s, 30s, and 40s coming to college to get their degree or certificate as well. Many have already started their families and are looking to make a better life for themselves and their kids.

Let me give you an example. NCCC operates the largest 2-year nursing program in Kansas. We have hundreds of women – and men – working through the program to become a nurse. We boast a near 100% placement rate for our graduates in nursing. Nurses make a pretty good living, so you can see the attraction. Many of these students are not 19 anymore. We also have Welding, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Surgical Technology, Health Information Technology, Construction, HVAC, Certified Nurse's Assistant, and on and on.

Lots of non 19-year-old folks are enrolling because they are ready for a change in their lives and are looking for more than just a basic living wage. There are jobs out there – good jobs – but you need to be certified to get many of them, and we can help!

Our newest program that is just starting this Monday is Court Reporter. That job pays VERY well after graduation and is in high demand in the State. NCCC has the ONLY public college program in Kansas and is located at our Ottawa campus.

I often get comments about NCCC being an “athletic” college, implying that most of our students are athletes. Of course, that’s how they see the college, especially at our Chanute campus, which is quite natural. The Chanute Tribune publishes many stories about the college successes, like our recent #9 ranking in the country from SmartAsset.com, which is great! But they have a sports page every day in the paper and often that is about one of our 10 teams. This column you are reading now that the paper very graciously gives me comes out once a month, but Panther sports coverage, well that’s about every day depending on the time of the year.

Despite all of that coverage, student athletes make up less than 10% of our student head count.

Don’t get me wrong, we LOVE our student athletes. They have a much higher GPA and complete college at a much higher rate than a typical student. Student athletes contributed over 4,000 hours of community service to the area. They have accomplished great things athletically such as Men’s Basketball winning our Division this year and Baseball with 51 wins and the first Triple Crown winner in the NJCAA since the 1980s. Without sports and the press coverage, many people many not even know there is a college in Neosho County. But, the point is, we are not just an athletic college.

Don’t forget, we also have a vital lifetime learning program for lots of folks, not looking to get a better job per se, just looking to learn something new and keep their minds sharp. Many of these folks are retired but are still learning. And, yes, these folks aren’t 19 either. Well, maybe in spirit they are.

So you can see that our mission is not just serving the standard “sent over from central casting” college student. We have all ages here coming to college for all kinds of reasons and we try to help them all. That is why our mission statement is broad. It’s not just “to graduate students and send them off to university” like some might think it is. It is “to enrich our communities and our students’ lives.”

We serve all ages no matter how well they are prepared for college. We serve all that come to us no matter how rich or poor they might be, their nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or gender. We serve those who were home schooled, those who go through our Adult Basic Education Program, and those who went through a traditional high school and may have graduated 3 months or 40 years ago.

We have very few entrance requirements, nearly 100% of those who apply get in and we like it that way. I am proud to say that there is nearly always a way for any person to go to college, and we can help make that happen. NCCC has very flexible schedules, financial aid, low tuition costs, and awesome tutoring help for students.

So we are off and running with another academic year! I am nearly as excited as the students I’m sure. And this year, thanks to Abrielle, my 16 year old, this academic year is hitting a little closer to home. If you have any questions or comments about this column or anything else please send them to me at binbody@neosho.edu.