

When I attended Oklahoma State University I was a Radio, Television, and Film major. Those who know me well know that this was the perfect major for me. As a child I would yell, "Take camera 2!" at the TV trying to anticipate when the shot would change. The other viewers in the room found this annoying for some reason.

When I finally got to OSU I was very excited to attend my broadcasting classes and learn these skills and techniques in subjects like, "Live TV Production," "Radio Announcing," "Remote Shooting and Editing," and my favorite, "TV Directing." Wow, did I love going to class, making student shows, and trying out new skills. But, it was not all fun.

The major also had two classes that were required and that everyone feared – Media Styles and Structures and Broadcast Law. These courses were known within the department as, "Weed-Out Classes," or courses specifically designed to fail large amounts of students so there would be less broadcasting majors. The instructors stated on the first day of the semester that 40-60% of the class will fail, that the role of the course was to separate the weak from the strong. There was a sense of pride in their voices and smiles on their faces when they said it too. I remember this well. I'm shuddering thinking about it right now.

These so-called beginning classes were incredibly hard in many ways, but particularly frustrating were the tests. They were among the most difficult I have ever taken, and I have gone on to earn a Masters Degree and a Doctorate. The classes were set up for large numbers of students to fail and it worked. Media Styles and Structures dwindled from about 100 students on the first day to about 30 left at the final exam. They didn't change the room as the semester wore on, so by the end this very big classroom had a lot of empty seats. Many fellow students in my Broadcast Law class had taken the course three and four times. I survived those classes, but most did not.

Nearly every department at OSU had Weed-Out classes to thin the herd at the time, or so it was rumored. It was common practice. This was the prevailing thought in higher education that the role of the institution was to teach, certainly, but also to keep the weak from graduating. In order for a degree to have true value it needed to be rare. In order to be rare you have to have a large number of students who try and fail to get it. Only by standing on the figurative corpses of the students who have failed can you truly stand tall as a graduate. This, of course, is ridiculous.

Coupled with this notion of the Weed-Out classes was the now outdated educational philosophy of the student's "Right to Fail." This was the idea that all of the responsibility of passing classes and getting the degrees rests entirely on the backs of the student. We, the Institution, should provide the classes but other than that, students must learn the hard way through failure to become self-motivated. It is not the Institution's job to get students to class, provide tutoring, warn them of low grades, provide emotional support or a food pantry. Our job is to lecture, give tests, score those exams, compute the final grade, and record the grade on a transcript. The End. Whatever happens to the student, well, that's up to them and their own motivation to figure out. We don't even need to take attendance. It's the student's business if they show up to class or not.

Not surprisingly the six-year college completion rate was about 50% at the time. Half failed to get their degree even after trying for six years. And some places were proud of that and promoted it.

How times have changed. Colleges and universities are being held accountable by accreditors, state governments, their governing boards, and the federal government on their graduation rates and all the elements that make that up. This includes persistence or the rate students complete a series of classes successfully, retention or enrolling in the next semester instead of quitting school, and, of course, graduation rates.

At NCCC we don't have Weed-Out classes and we don't believe in a student's Right to Fail. The unofficial motto of the college is, "Their success is our success." Our classes are rigorous but our instructors care. They make time to meet with students who are struggling. They keep electronic gradebooks that are updated often so students know where they stand. We call students who are doing poorly and try to get them help.

The faculty use interactive learning techniques to make classes more enriching. They are responsive to email and other contact from students. Through a faculty-led process called outcomes assessment the professors have shifted attention from what they are teaching to what the students are learning. They want the students to succeed and are willing to go the extra mile for them.

The college has free tutoring on any subject available both face-to-face and online. We provide online libraries that are open 24 hours a day, and even a physical library in Chanute that is also open 24 hours. There are open access computer labs, free printing, and even free coffee and cappuccino for our students to keep them fueled during the long hours of studying. We have a counselor and a food pantry to help emotional health as well as physical health. NCCC has many clubs and organizations and an active student government that has events so that students make friends and stay involved.

We do require attendance in most classes with some serious consequences if the student does not attend. In fact, one of our athletic teams along with the professors are piloting a new electronic method for checking that teams' attendance using their cell phones. The coaches are able to see live data on who is and is not attending class so they can hold those students accountable immediately in time to improve things, not after they fail the class. It's hard to pass a class if you are not there.

The change in emphasis from the number who fail to the number who succeed is working. The latest data from the National Student Clearing House shows the six-year graduation rate is now 65% at public universities! And higher still (76%) at non-profit private universities.

At NCCC we have some pretty good statistics ourselves. The National Community College Benchmarking Study shows that NCCC rates - top 20% of the nation for on-time completion, top 14% of the nation on successful transfer to a university, top 10% of the nation on completed at NCCC or transferred to university, top 3% of the nation on completed and transferred, top 18% on fall to spring persistence, top 11% on successful course completion (A,B,C or P). Wow!

The Kansas Board of Regents Databook ranks NCCC 6th among the community colleges in student success and ranks us 1st among the community colleges in percent of 2016 graduates employed (74%). In fact, we had the highest percentage of our headcount earning a degree or certificate among the community colleges in Kansas.

Our students are learning and completing and working in their chosen fields. It takes everyone pulling together with the student to achieve these results. The student must do the work and learn, but with our help, not despite our efforts.

Gone are the days of the Weed-Out class and the Right to Fail. What a tremendous waste of taxpayer dollars and student time they were. Good riddance. Now come the days of the student learning and student success. I very happy and proud to lead an institution that has fully embraced this change.

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