

We are up and running for Fall 2013 at NCCC! And I am happy to report that for the 13<sup>th</sup> straight year the College has posted a higher fall semester opening day enrollment than the previous years. We have had 13 straight years of fall semester growth at NCCC, never posting a loss in all that time. To put that in perspective for you, NCCC has 86% more enrollment this fall than we did in fall of 2000.

Enrollment is something we watch very closely at NCCC, as you can imagine. It is a measurement of just how vital we are to the community while providing some of the necessary dollars to operate the College. I have a “live” spreadsheet that automatically updates every day to show me just how many students are enrolled at our various locations and modalities. And over the years I have watched that spreadsheet show me many new enrollment trends.

For instance, fall enrollment at Ottawa has grown since the turn of the millennium from 3,100 credit hours in 2000 to 5,200 credit hours today, up 68%. However, the biggest change we have seen has been in our online campus. In 2000 it did not exist per se, just a few classes were offered via the internet. Now it has grown to 24% of our total enrollment and is poised to pass Ottawa as our second largest campus in the coming years.

As a college we have always had the philosophy of not trying to “force” enrollment, but rather to follow the enrollment trends. Some institutions often place classes where it is most convenient to an employee’s personal schedule, and not student need. You have probably heard stories of students unable to graduate because a certain class was not offered for another year or conflicted with other required courses. At NCCC we follow the needs of the students and assign times and locations to what we perceive will meet the needs of the greatest number of students based on those trends.

Night classes vs. online classes are an example of this. For years we had a large offering of these courses, only to see the enrollment dwindle year after year in some cases, while online classes filled instantly. Night classes help working adults in getting their needs met, but they still require the student to be available in the evening. Finding childcare or getting time away from work to attend classes can be a big issue even for night offerings. But with online classes you can work on the class at any time in the week that you want to – your schedule not ours. We followed this enrollment trend and offered more and more online classes while cutting back on night classes and we have grown because of it.

When the economy is bad enrollment is up at America’s community colleges as more people go back to college to get retrained for jobs that are currently open. From 2008 until last year we saw incredible increases in enrollment due to this, but now, especially in Franklin County, we are seeing unemployment numbers drop and our enrollment along with it. Don’t get me wrong, this is great for the region, just not good for enrollment.

Also, at our Ottawa Campus we have provided courses for KU students for many years called Western Civilization I and II and we had a very robust enrollment in those courses. This year KU no longer requires them for all majors and our enrollment dropped further. As a result of these two trends, enrollment has fallen about 13% at Ottawa. So we looked elsewhere.

Recently we have increased our enrollment through diversification – looking for new “markets,” if I can borrow that term from business, and fulfill newly identified needs in the area. Through a partnership with Emporia State University and Pittsburg State University we now provide developmental mathematics courses for their students. It is a wonderful arrangement for all involved. NCCC has had great results getting students ready for college algebra and the universities were under pressure from our legislature not to offer developmental courses (yet the students still needed them.)

We have greatly expanded our concurrent high school program by offering more technical education, such as welding in Garnett and allied health in Ottawa to all area schools. The programs were nearly full the day they were offered, so it has been a great success.

Here’s the part that most people don’t know about community college state aid in Kansas. If NCCC grows significantly, say doubling our enrollment for instance, guess how much state aid we will get for that growth. The answer - \$0. If NCCC loses half of its enrollment, guess how much our state aid will drop. The answer - \$0. That’s right. It doesn’t matter we grow or shrink. We will get the same check from the state.

As a result of a “hold harmless” policy combined with no new money for general education for years and years a college’s allocation is no longer tied to enrollment. Institutions that have shrunk over the past few years keep getting the same money, while colleges like NCCC that have grown keep getting the same money as well. (A note for accuracy here – for those technical education classes in the high school NCCC does get more money if enrollment grows, but that is a small part of everything we offer.)

The only incentive to grow, therefore, is increased tuition dollars. However the money earned from tuition often does not pay for the costs of offering a particular class, especially in technical education. A college could put itself out of business by growing too quickly and in the wrong areas. We need increases in state aid to offset those costs, and it simply does not exist. Tuition becomes more and more important in order to have the money to run the college.

In fact, the two-year budget passed by the legislature this May calls for a 1.5% decrease to community college funding for the 2014-2015 academic year. If that stands, we may grow in enrollment next year and get about \$50,000 less state aid. That loss will raise tuition \$1 a credit hour just to put the money back, before one even considers other things like utility and health care cost increases that raise the budget year after year.

There is talk of a “re-centering” plan for state tech education funding that would remove money from the shrinking community and technical colleges and give it to the growing ones, but, as you can imagine, those that are set to lose money are asking for that not to happen. Some will lose in the neighborhood of \$800,000-\$900,000 a year if the plan goes through. We would get about \$300,000 more for our technical education. I’ll let you know if that becomes a reality. My thinking is that if it does happen it will have to be phased in slowly over a period of years so that the “losing” colleges have the opportunity to adjust.

So while I'm very happy that enrollment continues to rise at NCCC thanks to diversification, I just wish the state aid would go up with it.

As always I welcome your thoughts and questions at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).