

Grade cards!

I am lucky that both of my girls are very interested in getting good grades. One girl in particular was quite upset recently that she failed to score a 100% on the state math assessment. She scored a 97%. (I was incredibly proud, she cried.) While I don't like my girls upset, I do like it when they set high goals and try their hardest to make it. Every quarter my wife and I go over the grade cards with our two looking for successes to celebrate and items that could be improved. I'm sure it is a time-honored tradition in many homes.

Recently, President Obama created a scorecard for every higher education institution in the country which rates every institution in four areas – graduation rate, cost attending, student loan default rate, and the amount that students borrow to attend.

You can Google “White House college score card” to go to the site and type in our college to see for yourself. NCCC got high marks in college cost and student amount borrowed. We were above average in graduation rate and about average in college loan default rate. Overall, I was pleased with those numbers, though I see some room for improvement. It is difficult for us to control the loan default rate, since that is up to the student to pay their bills after college, but we still can address the importance of borrowing only what you need to complete a degree, not the yearly maximum amount. Over borrowing is certainly related to higher default rate.

While I appreciate the White House attempt to score us, their method is just not robust enough for us to focus our resources on what could be improved at the College.

The College does its own grade card every year on how we meet our mission, vision and purposes and use that assessment to shape our decisions and our plans for the future. We call our grade card the Institutional Effectiveness Dashboard. It links together more than 25 internal and external studies and reports of the college into one massive meta-analysis that measures those items which we value the most – our purposes. These sources include nationally normed student surveys, required federal reports, state measurements, self-assessments, outside accreditation reports, student retention and completion data, transfer GPA reports, and on and on. So how did we do?

The score card gave us high marks in many of our purposes and its components such as student learning and student success, responsiveness to stakeholders, ensuring access, and meeting community needs. We did not have the strongest scores in some components of our purposes, such as the development of leaders, cultural enrichment, and individualized advising.

So we began focusing on those areas, developing plans and rearranging resources to try to improve those scores next year. We have added supervisor training sessions for our employees, added funds to our professional development account, added additional performances, and have developed a plan to reorganize our student development office to, among other things, improve advising.

For students, we also measure our general education requirements and how well students are learning. We have four main general education outcomes – Communicate effectively, think analytically, live a healthy lifestyle, and practice responsible citizenship. We test these requirements through the course outcomes in these areas using our national award-winning assessment system. So how did the students do?

We scored high in all of the general education outcomes except analytical thinking. While the score was still “passing” according to our goals, it showed that we have room for improvement. College faculty have had meetings to discuss different ways to strengthen student awareness and demonstration of analytical thinking within the courses they take, including identification of additional analytical thinking artifacts and incorporation of more skills such as problem solving, innovative thinking, etc. I am anxious to see how we do at the end of this year. I’m looking forward to the score going up.

We believe in grades and score cards at the College. The Board of Trustees gives me a list of goals to accomplish every year and I give them a report as to our progress. You can read my yearly report on our website on the President’s page. My evaluation is directly tied to these goals and how well we accomplished them. This was an excellent year for our faculty and staff who really did an awesome job advancing the College and making me look good (and I need all the help I can get). I am quite proud!

One may argue about the importance of grades and score cards. Grades are often a tool for motivation, helping us to keep learning and improving what we know and what we can do. This is true for my two students at home. It is also true for NCCC.

If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).