

My coffeemaker has Wi-Fi. Yeah, I couldn't believe it myself. Here's the story.

My oldest daughter is headed off To Friends University in a few weeks after completing two associates' degrees from NCCC. If you have ever shipped a child off to start their own place, in this case a shared apartment on campus at Friends, then you know they often are the recipient of older household items you were looking to replace anyway. She has made off with several items including a TV, lamps and the old coffeemaker. So I went looking for a new one. I saw a new one on sale and picked it up. I admit I did not read the features on the box too closely. The only feature I was interested in was – it makes coffee.

When I set it up at home, the instructions told me how to connect it to my home Wi-Fi network. Why would a coffeemaker need to connect to the internet? So it can keep track of how many coffee pods I drink (too many) and then automatically order new ones when I start getting low on pods. It offered me \$20 worth of free pods if I signed up, so I did, at least until I get my free pods anyway.

The world has changed in regard to connectivity and expectation of service. Right now we have fallen in love with the new service that allows you to do your grocery shopping with your cell phone at home and then show up the next day to have the employees bring the groceries out to your car for you. I would have REALLY loved this service when the girls were little. I still recall with a shudder the experience of trying to get the groceries bought with a two and a four year old in my cart or running around the store. It saves time and also keeps me from impulse-buying things that may not be the healthiest choices.

In the marketplace you adapt to your customers' expectations or you don't survive. The bad news is that it is getting harder and harder to surpass expectations on the subject of connectivity and service. I mean, my coffeemaker orders its own coffee that's delivered to my door. That went way beyond my expectations when I bought it. Will I now expect that of any new appliance I purchase?

At NCCC we have been trying ways to be more connected to our students and surpass their expected level of service. Every class at the college, including face-to-face classes, online classes and hybrid classes that combine the two methods of delivery, has its own webpage. We call this the Learning Management System or LMS. At NCCC we have branded our LMS as myNeosho.

On myNeosho, instructors can post all of the handouts for the class, make assignments, conduct class discussions through forums, and even give tests. The student can communicate directly with the instructor and see their grades "live" as they change on the system. In fact, they get an alert when their grade is updated after an assignment is scored and recorded. I remember having no idea what my grade was in a class until the very end of the semester. Now students know as soon as each score is recorded in the gradebook.

Of course this has changed student's expectations. I was pleased if I got an assignment back two weeks or so after I turned it in. Now students are emailing the instructor the day after the due date wondering when the grade will be posted. That puts more pressure on the faculty to meet this expectation.

With myNeosho students can pay their bill, see the upcoming class schedule, get enrolled, take entire classes, talk with their instructor and see their unofficial transcript. It's open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We have added items to this LMS to make it even better. We have a product call Zoom that allows for videoconferencing with the entire class or just one-on-one with the instructor and the student.

Next year we are adding the ability to manage the syllabi for all classes across the whole system. The syllabi is a document we provide to all students at the start of class that contains the rules of the class, how to get help from the college, how grades are figured, the class calendar, how to contact the instructor, and many other pieces of useful information. With this new program we will be able to change the syllabi in one place and have the change be reflected throughout all classes, saving hours of time editing hundreds of documents.

We are also adding a new way to gather student input quickly and easily. Soon students will have a way of reviewing all of our classes and sharing their thoughts with the instructor anonymously on ways the class went well and on ways it could improve. We have been asking students their opinions on the classes for years, but this new way saves a great deal of time making it possible for every course to be reviewed every semester.

We are also adding personnel to help instructors make their classes and the electronic resources even better. Our new Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment will be assisting faculty with better and more timely assessments of learning, helping them find ways to improve the class experience and what is retained. We are also adding a new Director of the Online Campus and Instructional Support who is charged with helping faculty improve the quality and quantity of online artifacts and course design to make the classes even better.

We are even improving our website with better organization and flashier design including video. It will be great!

Connecting to students the way they prefer on the timeline they request is getting more and more complicated, but it is what is now expected. NCCC is constantly looking for ways to meet and exceed this expectation from our students. This is the generation that grew up with a cell phone and a coffeemaker that orders its own coffee. They bring that desire for connectivity to college with them and we need to be ready.

What's next is anyone's guess. But one thing is constant – the need to adapt to change.

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