

Senior Lunch is coming back! I've been waiting over a year to say that, and I'm very happy that the day has finally arrived. The number of positive cases in the county has fallen to the point that the college has moved to Level 4 on its Pandemic Response Scale. Just to remind you, Level 0 was locking the doors and sending everyone home to work, while Level 4 resembles Pre-COVID normalcy in many ways.

One of those ways is a return to off-campus visitors, including all of our seniors (the older kind of seniors, not the high school seniors, if you were wondering) in the area that would join us for senior lunch every Thursday. NCCC invites all Neosho County seniors to have lunch at the Chanute Campus for a low cost through our partner Great Western Dining. Typically we would have between 70 and 100 seniors come to campus and have lunch with us each Thursday. As in years past senior lunch will begin the Thursday after Labor Day, September 9th and continues through the end of the semester. It then starts back up in the spring semester and runs through May. Be looking for more information about it as the September start date gets closer.

It is not just senior lunch that's invited back, but other community groups as well such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Noon Ball, and many others! It will be great to have everyone who utilizes the college back on campus.

Level 4 means that we are no longer requiring masks on campus. However, we are recommending masks for those who are unvaccinated. Masks are a pain, that's for sure, but necessary, especially before the vaccines were so available. However, I must admit, there are a few times I will miss the masks – such as visiting gas station restrooms, shoveling snow, bad breath after lunch, not showing my scowl at disappointing news, and many other times.

We are still asking those who do not feel well to not come to any of our buildings. To be honest, that's always been a rule. Even before COVID, if you have the flu or a cold, please don't come. I know that sounds obvious, but you might be surprised at the number of people, especially employees, we have had to send home in the past who did not want to miss a day of work. While that work-ethic is appreciated, it's not worth spreading illness to others.

Much like masks in gas station bathrooms, and staying home if you are sick, we have learned a few things that will transcend the pandemic. For instance, while zoom meetings are not always wonderful, they are vastly better than traveling to the other side of Kansas and back for a two-hour meeting taking up a full day and the associated travel expenses.

We also learned that some students do not learn as well in a remote environment. But, there are a few who do better in a "virtual" setting. To that end we have added a new "modality" to the college which we call virtual hybrid. I'm sure you know about face-to-face classes where you go to class and learn in person, which is still the majority of our classes. Virtual Hybrid is a lot like face-to-face with a live instructor but the student is watching remotely, free to ask questions and participate from anywhere. Time will tell if the new classes will gather enrollment. But we do love to provide options for students to best meet their schedules and preferred learning methods.

Travel will be allowed for employees in Level 4 and all of our sports will return to their normal yearly schedule. You may recall that we played nearly ALL of the seasons in one semester. Wow! That was an insane challenge of scheduling, travel, COVID protocols, pushing everyone to their limits. But it

happened and with some success. NCCC had successful seasons in many sports like men's soccer, men's basketball, softball, baseball, and our volleyball went to the national tournament for the first time ever! And our teams continued their long tradition of academic success as well!

Our athletic conference the KJCCC, or Jayhawk as it is nicknamed, will be releasing their own updated COVID protocol, but barring any local county restrictions, we should be returning to fans in the stands this year!

While Level 4 does represent a near return to pre-COVID days, it also implies that the pandemic is not over. I personally believe that we are in the eye of a hurricane right now. We have weathered the first part of the storm, but after the calmness of the eye passes, the storm may very well return. If that happens and the number of cases surge then the level might have to be adjusted again. We all remember what happened after Halloween in the county and how the numbers stayed high all the way through New Year's Day. I sure hope that doesn't happen, especially since it is now avoidable.

I do recommend that everyone who is eligible strongly consider talking with their health professional about getting vaccinated. If we all step up and do our part to protect each other and form a community of immunity this second half of the hurricane might very well be avoided. To that end NCCC is joining with Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center and the Neosho County Health Department to sponsor a series of vaccination events later this summer. Let's get ready for Halloween beyond just carving pumpkins, and protect ourselves and others who can't get vaccinated. Let's keep the recovery going!