

I'm a sucker for clever tricks in writing. You may have discovered in reading my columns that they have the same basic outline – a personal story, linked (usually in a clunky way) to something going on at the college, then summed up with a reference back to that personal story. If you find something that works stick with it until you run it into the ground! But I do love other tricks in writing. (Here's the personal story.)

I'm a big fan of oxymorons - you recall this from English class, right? They're two words put together that often mean just the opposite. Things like jumbo shrimp, loose tights, and live recording. My new favorite is "unbiased opinion." Opinions are, you know...biased...by definition.

Along with oxymorons, I do love a good paradox. A paradox is when two things are seemingly contradictory but can be both true at the same time. The most famous of these probably belongs to Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." How can both be true? Well, it takes Dickens about 300 pages to convince you of that paradox. (Here comes the linkage to something at NCCC.)

Over the years I have been telling you that one of the greatest strengths of the Kansas higher education system is that every one of the 32 institutions is unique with its own way of doing things. And one of the greatest weaknesses of the Kansas higher education system institutions is that every one of them is unique with its own way of doing things. Hopefully I explain how both are true, in about 700 more words (besting Dickens by 138,905), and how the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) and the state institutions are doing more to address this weakness.

In the recent past each one of the 32 public institutions was free to design its courses, majors, and degrees to their own specifications. This helped each college or university establish their own distinctiveness. The courses, programs, and degrees were not the same so that a degree in, say, business at KU, is different than the same degree at PSU. It made the programs unique and let the faculty shape the degree as they saw fit. But this uniqueness has a pretty big drawback.

Certain classes for a major program may be required at one college but may not even be accepted at another. So if you decided to move from KU to PSU for whatever reason, you would undoubtedly lose credit hours in transfer. That might cost you years and certainly significant dollars.

So while there is still a big problem with program classes transferring from one college to another today, over the years I have told you how KBOR has had some successful initiatives to work on transfer of many individual classes. Over 100 classes now move from college to college without loss. As an educator who helped get this effort off the ground, I'm so excited to see how much it has grown and improved over the years!

But while courses now transfer from place to place, just how they count toward someone's general education is still part of the wonderful and awful uniqueness issue. Getting a degree from one institution may not fully meet the basic general education requirements at another. You can get a full associate of arts or associate of science (or both) from NCCC, for instance, and still not meet the basic general education requirements of some public universities. This particular issue is something that I care a lot about for all our graduates at NCCC, but one in particular. (This column has a BONUS personal story coming up!)

My youngest daughter Alayna earned two associate degrees from NCCC and decided to transfer to Kansas State University. She was anticipating jumping into her major program classes in business, which she did, but she was informed that she had to take another general education class (Human Geography) even though she already had earned a degree. She was mad that she had to spend 16 weeks in a class that she didn't want, and I was mad I had to pay for it. But I couldn't help but think of all of those other graduates of NCCC who have to take more general education courses costing them time and money all because of the love of distinctiveness.

Now KBOR and Kansas public institutions are finally addressing this situation. By fall of 2024 all of the institutions will have a similar framework for the general education that makes up most associate and bachelor's degrees! It's a simple, elegant approach that will serve students well. I love the concept, but I don't love the name – the Seven Bucket Framework. It was the best of names, it was the worst of names.

So students fill their seven buckets with the different kinds of courses at one institution and the others will accept that as fully meeting the general education at their institution. Simple. The trade-off is that some institutions may not agree with how others have set up their buckets. And still others may not like limiting their own general education to comply with the framework. But the rewards are equal in strength – no extra classes for the general education, simplified requirements – which should translate into better degree completion for our students. (Here comes the summary and reference back to the personal story.)

While it is important to be distinct as an institution we should not do that at the expense of students and their families. I applaud the leadership at KBOR and its institutions coming together to make this happen for the students of the state! And that is my unbiased opinion!

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