

My daughter has a pair of bellbottom jeans. They are her favorite. Bellbottoms, I thought, had gone the way of the Dodo bird, never to be seen again. But here she was, beaming at her purchase.

Jen and I were watching Dr. No, the 1962 classic film that introduced James Bond. A woman on the screen was working as a desk clerk in a pretty dress. Jen said, "I would wear that! That is very much back in style."

My daughter's fiancé collects vinyl phonograph records. Remember those? They were far from portable, required a turntable with a needle, and only played a handful of songs without having to flip the record to the other side. They had all but gone, but now phonographs are making a huge comeback. In 2010 only about 2 million vinyl albums were sold. Last year it was 43.5 million. Audiophiles claim that analog sound is far superior to a digital recording. "Pure sound" is back in fashion despite the obvious drawbacks.

Just a small aside here. I have a long love affair with phonographs. I was a broadcast student in college in the 1980s where I learned how to be a radio disk jockey. DJ was a very hands-on job back in the day where we had to take a turntable out of gear and back it up half a turn so that it gets up to speed before a particular track plays. It was a lot of fun being a DJ and I loved it.

Things that were once seen as outdated or past its prime sometimes prove that it can be important and desirable again given the right situation or it finds its niche.

When I was in high school most of the pressure was put on all of us to go to college and get a bachelor's degree. Of course the value of the bachelor's degree is quite evident. The average wage of a bachelor's degree holder is much higher than those without one. Degree holders live longer and have a much lower chance to be incarcerated. Emphasis in the curriculum was mostly about admission to a college or university. The school would brag about who they got into highly selective colleges and what percentage of the graduating class was going on to college.

What was trending out was career and technical education. My high school had very robust programs in carpentry, welding, electronics, typing, and home economics. Then as I was moving through I saw many of those programs go away. Luckily many students got to go to a Vo-Tech program in Tulsa, but most other schools didn't have access to this.

When I got to NCCC, other than health care, we had phased out most of our tech ed programs by 2003. Only one program was left and that program ended in 2004. Through a partnership with USD 413 we were able to restart welding and construction, but only for that one district.

And so it was until, as the song says, everything old became new again.

There was a rebirth of technical education in Kansas through a Brownback-era initiative called SB 155 or as it is known today Excel in CTE. By the way, I learned the hard way that the legislature reuses those numbers year after year. So what was SB 155 one year about career and tech ed, later is a bill for something completely different. A few years ago I said publically what a difference Senate Bill 155 was making, and someone replied, "I didn't know the college had a position on medical marijuana." Ah, we don't.

Excel in CTE is a program that makes career and technical education classes at their local community or technical college free to all high school students. It has been a boon to our enrollment at NCCC and provided a much needed technical workforce for the state. How big of an impact you ask?

In 2012, only 3,870 students in the whole state were in college career and technical education programs at high schools. That number has risen to 13,712 students in 2021! That a 260% increase in student headcount! The number of credentials earned went from 548 a year in 2012 to 1658 in 2022. That's ten years of amazing progress!

For NCCC we have seen that growth and have been able to take advantage of it better than most. Overall NCCC is 15th out of the 19 community colleges in terms of headcount size but we are 5th in the state in terms of credentials earned!

Our graduates do better than most when it comes to salary too! On the average our graduates make about \$8,100 more than others in the state. Our graduates are making over \$42,000 a year right out of college.

And our graduates stay in Kansas at a higher rate. Our graduates stay in Kansas about 76% of the time. The statewide average is 68%. We are proud of that!

Tech Education is back! The college has grown tremendously in these offerings. We are filling workforce needs, graduates are getting great paying jobs, and they are staying in Kansas to boot.

So let's dust off our Pet Rocks, wear our bellbottoms, drop the needle on some Lynyrd Skynyrd, and have a Tab cola. Everything old is certainly new again! Dig it man! Groovy!

If you have any questions about this article or anything else about the college email me binbody@neosho.edu (or send me some US mail with a real stamp on it. Remember letters?)