

I'll admit that sometimes I see the holidays as a series of lists that need to be completed. There are meals to prepare, shopping to complete, decorations to hang, wrapping to finish, cards to address, packages to mail, and on and on. It really challenges me to stop and consider the meaning of the season.

Don't get me wrong. In our household we celebrate Christmas and we have a lot of fun doing it. We love everything about the season, the food, presents, family gatherings, all of it. I truly love our decorations, especially Virtual Santa. Driving by it appears that Santa is walking around our house delivering gifts and eating cookies. If you haven't seen it, you should come by at 8th and Evergreen. I understand that a trip by our house is a holiday tradition for some families who sometimes stay the whole 23 minutes that Santa walks around my living room. "We can't leave until Santa waves out the window to us," I have been told.

Yes, Santa goes up and we watch a long list of holiday movies, shop endlessly and cook a lot of things that one should not eat on a regular basis if one wants to keep the same size clothing for the next year.

But it is also quite a hassle to get everything done with all of the parties at home, extended families on both sides, at work, etc. It can be exhausting and one can forget the importance of what is being celebrated and why all of this is important. We must all take time to reflect on what this time of year means to each of us.

Sometimes seeing the meaning in what we do at Neosho County Community College can be a challenge for some of our offices and positions thanks to a long list of what must be done. Our tree is often trimmed with red tape.

In recent years we in higher education have entered an Age of Accountability. All of the different constituency groups that we work with at NCCC have new and growing expectations to make doubly sure that we are accountable for the resources we have been given. These expectations are sometimes in the form of new regulations, or data requests, or procedures, or reports, or requirements. The groups range from the Higher Learning Commission, to the US Department of Education, to the Technical Education Authority, to Kansas Board of Regents, to US Department of Labor, to OSHA, to state and local government agencies, and on and on. Each needs to justify what they give the college. In this Age of Accountability, where there is no free ride, they want more and more every year. If one fails to meet those requirements, there can be coal in your stocking from that group for sure!

You should see the list of things that are required that must be done perfectly and on time just to keep what you already have. It is quite daunting. They have important sounding names riddled with acronyms like the KSPSD, Outcomes Metrics, Pathways Project, Clery Report, Title IX Report, 20th Day Report, IPEDS, and on and on. The Pell Grant requirements alone are long and involved. Every few years Congress reauthorizes that grant, which I'm grateful for, but adds a whole lot of new requirements, which I am not grateful for. These are often "unfunded mandates" where the college must add something new to stay in the US Department of Education's good graces, but receives no new money to do that with. As Cousin Eddie says in Christmas Vacation about the Jelly of the Month membership, "Clark, that's the gift that keeps on giving the whole year." That it is Edward.

Those of us in administration of a college can easily see their job as doing nothing but satisfying this seemingly endless demand for more and more. We don't see students as often as the instructors do, but we do see forms, data, spreadsheets, regulations, requirements, and my personal favorite, "Dear Colleague" letters. One hopes that what is asked for is actually used by these groups to make the world a better place, and not just to justify jobs in their respective agencies or goes in a report that no one ever reads. This is my Christmas Wish anyway. Because it is a lot of work to keep them happy, it would be nice to know it means something.

All this bureaucracy can make one forget what we are truly about – students and student learning. Nurses' graduation is coming soon at our Ottawa Campus followed by GED graduation on the same day. When I see all of those students cross the stage now and in May at the full college graduation I am reminded of the true meaning of what we are doing. At those moments I remember why we do what we do to satisfy those constituency groups with all their demands. The endless task of keeping bureaucrats satisfied becomes very worthwhile. It is then that I greatly appreciate all of those agencies and organizations that gave us the resources we need to help students cross that stage and start a better life for themselves and their families.

Neosho County Community College greatly needs the help of the Higher Learning Commission, the US Department of Education, the Technical Education Authority, the Kansas Board of Regents, the US Department of Labor, OSHA, the State of Kansas and our local government. It takes all of those groups to keep our higher education system strong and, in turn, NCCC strong. Such affiliations give value and meaning to the degrees and certificates that students achieve while giving resources to the college to create the best possible student experience and fully prepare our graduates for the future.

Our mission at NCCC is not to "fulfill the needs and wishes of bureaucrats everywhere," though some days it feels like that. It is to "Enrich our Communities and Our Students' Lives." So to all of the wonderful folks we work with at all of those agencies and organizations please accept my sincere thanks for all you do for our college and our students. I wish you a Happy Holiday and a Merry New Year! May your data be uncorrupted and your letters returned promptly!

From the Inbody Family to each and every one reading this, have a Happy Holiday and a Merry Christmas! And for 2016 may the best of your past be the worst of your future.

If you want to send along your holiday greetings or anything else, please write me at binbody@neosho.edu.