

This Thanksgiving will be very strange for me. I'm guessing you think I'm referring to the pandemic, but I am not. This will be the first Thanksgiving in which my oldest daughter will be going to – get ready for this- a boyfriend's house (insert a fatherly groan with eye roll here)-for the holiday meal. Jen and I moved our meal to Friday so we can still be together as a family.

Yes, I know I have been lucky so far to have both my girls on Thanksgiving every year. Yes, I know that it was bound to happen and I should be grateful that we will get together the next day. All that being said, we have been moved down a notch on the “who she wants to be with on the holiday” scale for the first time and I don't like it. Is it too much to ask that they break up for the day and get back together after Thanksgiving? I'm just kidding (or am I?).

It will make me happy to have my two girls together on Thanksgiving, whenever it is celebrated. And happiness is at a premium.

It's hard to be happy right now. One only has to watch a bit of the news, or hear stories of sickness from those around us, or try to plan the holidays with the possibility of not seeing large groups of family to feel the happiness drain away.

There is considerable sickness, unrest, division, and fear. I have seen it in some of my students and employees, and sometimes myself. I would prefer to say that I have always risen to the occasion and provided steadfast positive leadership for the College every day throughout the crises, like Churchill during the Battle of Britain, or at least Patrick Mahomes during the Superbowl, but from time to time my happiness has been affected too. However, November may provide a much-needed tonic for the soul for all of us.

Did you know that there is a direct positive correlation between happiness and gratitude? It's true! Several studies in the science of happiness have found that those who regularly express gratitude were happier than those who did not. And those who increased their expression of gratitude saw their self-reported happiness levels rise. People who began and kept a gratitude journal, or called someone to tell them how thankful they were for something they did, or made a public declaration of gratitude saw their own happiness level increase significantly. You should give it a try!

November is the traditional month of giving thanks, and there has been no year before where being grateful for what we have has been more important in my opinion. So it may be a bit self-serving, but I would like to thank some people that have helped us make a difference at the college this year.

First, I'm thankful for many of you! I am grateful to everyone in our communities for their help and understanding during this difficult time. We have had to greatly limit some of the most wonderful aspects of the college this year to lower the chances of exposure to the virus for both the members of the community and our students. For instance, I LOVE seeing our seniors come to lunch on Thursdays. I love talking with them and discussing everything from the weather to the quality of the meal. This year though, we made the difficult decision to suspend that. I appreciate everyone being patient with us.

To our civic groups who have traditionally met at the college, I am very thankful for your understanding as well. I know it has been difficult to find other places to meet. We hope to have you back on campus soon.

This semester the faculty had to offer most of their classes both face-to-face and by live teleconference simultaneously. The instructor taught to both the students in the room and live over Zoom webcams at the same time. We needed to lower the count in some of our classes to achieve social distancing by having some learn remotely. Also with the number that were self-isolated this semester we needed a way for those students to attend class from anywhere so they would not fall behind. It was hard to learn and difficult to pull off, but the faculty did it!

I am thankful for our students who have been so quick to adapt despite the ever-evolving situation. We had to change class set-up, self-isolate large numbers at times, and change the way they eat, play, and go to class. They have had to live with lots of restrictions and protocols, many of them uncomfortable. But most have risen to the occasion.

I am very grateful to our staff who found new ways to conduct their jobs and still meet students' needs. They have met by zoom teleconferencing, worked from home when needed, and kept in touch with students when it was hard to do. They helped keep our students safe, and made them feel connected to the institution while doing it.

My Board of Trustees deserves a special thanks for all their support and faith in me and the Core Emergency Response Team. Early on the trustees allowed me the latitude to do what had to be done to get the college open and keep it that way all while providing a safer environment. I greatly appreciate their backing during this difficult time.

A special thank you goes to our partners like the public school administrators who have been great to work with as we made change after change to increase safety while still providing services to the districts within our service area and beyond.

Our chief partners through the pandemic continue to be the various county health departments who have been great to work with. But I would be greatly remiss if I did not thank Neosho County Regional Medical Center for all of their help, guidance, and direction. They provided our COVID testing and invaluable advice on handling the multitude of individual situations that have come up throughout the semester. Beckie Manahan at the hospital has been outstanding through this semester and the College owes her a debt of gratitude.

Another proven element of happiness is the faith that things will get better. In the book *Good to Great* Admiral Jim Stockdale, a survivor of the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner of war camp in Vietnam, knew that soldiers who set dates in their minds when their interment would end were the first to crack. When the date they set came and went the soldiers would despair. How did Stockdale handle it? To quote him, "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

While we must confront the brutal facts of the pandemic, as Stockdale says, we must not lose our faith that we will one day prevail.

As I write this several vaccine makers have released very encouraging news about the preliminary findings of their drugs. Help may soon be on the way. While we wait, the College will remain vigilant in our protocol and grateful to those who have helped us adapt to keep serving our mission of enriching our communities and our students' lives.

And now I have to get ready for a FRIDAY Thanksgiving, for which I am grateful and happy.