

“I don’t want to belong to any club that would have me as a member.” That’s a quote from the immortal Groucho Marx. Personally, I’m a member of the Chanute Rotary Club and I get a lot of enjoyment from club membership.

We have lots of clubs and organizations for students to join at NCCC. In fact, besides athletics and student government, we sponsor 20 different clubs and activities on a wide variety of interests. We have Literature and Movie Club, the Black Student Union, International Club, Science Club, Theatre Club, Music Club, Nursing Club, Business Club, Knitting Club (yes, a knitting club) and on and on.

But why do we have these clubs? Aren’t they a waste?

It takes time out of the day of the faculty and staff to sponsor these clubs. Each club has a small budget in order to put on events. So while it is usually free to the student, it’s not free to the College. If the goal of students is to gain credit hours on the way to a degree or certificate it would seem that clubs are a distraction from that goal. Whatever time is spent participating in a club could be better spent studying class materials, right?

So why do we do it? For a couple of very good reasons.

First, for student retention. Retention is higher education jargon for keeping the student moving toward their education goal and not dropping out. Research has shown that students do a lot better in college and stay longer the more that they are involved. Clubs facilitate students meeting each other and making connections. When students have friends at college they tend to want to stay enrolled and not get suspended for a low GPA.

Human beings are social creatures. We need family and friends around us, encouraging us and sharing in our lives. If a person goes too long without friends or family he or she often gets depressed. When a student enters college they often do that alone with few friends going with them. Prolonged isolation is one of the worst things you can do for your own mental health. Add the stress of transitioning to college and that is a recipe for drop out.

We try to get them in a club so that they meet people and form a new support group quickly. In fact, the first week of classes we have a “Club Fair” to show the students what clubs are available. We need them to make friends and quickly if they are to stay and clubs facilitate that. I don’t know about your experience, I made some of my best life-long friends in college. When we have alumni dinners and mixers at the college, I watch our past students share memories, laugh, and hug. I know life-long friendships were made here at NCCC too.

The second reason NCCC sponsors clubs is to enrich the college experience. In an ideal situation, college should be more than just a collection of classes taken over a period of time. I remember one study that asked students years after they graduated what was the most important or meaningful experience of their college careers. Believe it or not, it was not studying for a biology final, or learning how to figure a derivative in calculus. Most recalled a time with a club or organization or perhaps an assignment where they went off campus to support the community and help make someone’s life a little better. It is

where they learned about giving a little back to the world, about social responsibility, community involvement, and trying to make a small difference in someone's life.

At NCCC we require our clubs and organizations to do at least one act of service to the community or the college per semester. If you are in Chanute you may have seen our many athletes helping with a variety of events. Athletes are bell ringers at Christmas time, help fill Halloween candy sacks, read to kids at Cherry Street, and carry out the trash during Artists Alley. Our Ottawa Science Club creates take-home science projects for kids such as how to dissect an owl pellet. Our History Club helps the College put on Citizenship Day on the anniversary of the ratification of the US Constitution by passing out pocket constitutions (and apple pies!). The Knitting Club makes items to give away to needy families. Recently our honor society, Phi Theta Kappa, led a very successful food drive for both Chanute and Ottawa.

Not all of the learning that takes place at a college is graded and assigned a credit hour. Think about the life lessons students are learning being active participants in a club or organization. They are learning to organize groups, getting extra education about their chosen field, and give to their community while they make new friends. Clubs are part of what makes the college experience such a wonderful time in someone's life.

Students who don't get involved, who go it alone, are some of the first to drop out of school. Think about the cost to the taxpayer of an unsuccessful semester, not only in subsidizing the failed student's education, but the fact that college dropouts often have very few skills to get them a job. The long term effects of a lack of education on a society is huge.

I tell students during our freshmen orientation class that college is a lot like a bank account – you get out of it what you put into it, with interest. For the most part students who join clubs complete degrees and are perhaps a little more socially aware than those who don't. For that reason, Groucho, maybe should have joined a club.

Also, for no reason at all, here's my next favorite Groucho quote, "Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."

If you have any questions or comments or would like to share your favorite Groucho quote email me at binbody@neosho.edu.