

I hate waiting. How bad do I hate it? I now record sporting events so I can fast forward through the commercials and even the instant replays on a football game to get to the next play. I can watch a full game in about 25 minutes or so. I'm the guy that expects to get that response email the very second I order something online. Let's face it, immediate gratification just isn't fast enough for me.

I know, patience is a virtue, but a virtue that I lost many years ago. Like the old joke says, "God grant me patience – Right NOW!"

That's why I have been on the edge of my seat for the past four months. I have been waiting for a very special report to be accepted.

At Neosho County Community College we have been waiting to hear from our accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission, about how we did on our recent visit. Once every 10 years the college must go through an intense process of self-study and submit a long report to the Higher Learning Commission. The report measures NCCC against the five main criteria of accreditation (and the 21 sub-criteria, and the 68 sub-sub-criteria, and the 19 federal mandates – yeah, it's that fun to write). Then a visiting team of peer-reviewers from the HLC come to the College to review that document and confirm the information during a three-day visit.

That team then writes its own report notifying the HLC if the College has met all of those requirements. The peer-reviewers' report also contains recommendations for improvement and possibly even recommends sanctions against the institution. The Commission can, in turn, receive the team's report without comment, reject it, and/or change it in some way.

Back in 2002, NCCC was sanctioned and, quite severely, by the commission. In 2004, those sanctions were lifted after a Herculean effort by the employees to address the concerns of the accrediting body in two short years. Even though the sanctions were lifted, the ghosts of that time have haunted NCCC ever since.

10 years have passed and your college endeavored to get progressively better year by year. We greatly improved our assessment of student learning to the point that we have won two national awards for our method of assessment. In fact, the method we invented is now used by many other colleges in the region!

Our Board of Trustees greatly improved. Now our Trustees receive regular training on how to be a proper community college leaders. They have adopted a model that puts the President as the sole employee of the Trustees. The days of micromanagement of the college are over. They hire good people, hold them accountable and let them do their jobs.

Our finances have improved as well. In the 10 years since the last HLC visit, we have re-roofed all of our Chanute Campus buildings, replaced much of the campus heating and cooling system, built the new Ottawa Campus, completed renovations of Rowland Hall, the Athletic Facilities, the Chapman Learning Center, and now Stoltz Hall. NCCC has fully met its policy requiring operating reserves. It took 10 years

to get there, but we did it! We certainly have more work to do on the facilities, but little by little we are updating and improving.

So, as you can imagine I could not wait for the visiting team to come and see all of the fantastic work we have done in the past 10 years to make NCCC what it is today – a premier community college. They came in September and we had a great visit with them. But we had to wait for the HLC to endorse their conclusion. Pins and Needles for me!!

Finally, just a few weeks ago now, the HLC approved our self-study and the visiting team's report. The report contained no sanctions or follow-up reports of any kind. In addition, NCCC was given its choice of method of accreditation in the future. Only about 20% of the over 1,300 institutions in the HLC can make such a boast. We are reaccredited for 10 years! Our next visit is in 2023-2024. (My youngest daughter will go from 11 to 21 in that time – wow! She was two the last time HLC was here in 2004. How time flies.)

The 2013 visiting team was very impressed with the college. One peer-reviewer told me, "I think you can say that the ghosts of the past have been exorcised." That was such a relief to hear. I felt like the massive work we have put in for the past 10 years was fully recognized.

The HLC was so impressed with our self-study report that they invited us to be a model college for their "share fair" at the next annual meeting. Two of our employees will be showing off our self-study in order to help other colleges who are in the process of writing theirs. And we have been asked to conduct a session at that same meeting on coming through a sanction and how it made our college stronger. Wow! We could not have been happier with the results.

I want to thank all of you who helped during the visit. Many folks submitted letters of support and came to an open session to meet with the reviewers. Thank you so much for your time. Our Trustees spent a lot of time preparing for their meeting with the peer-reviewers (ok, maybe I scared them a bit into over-preparing, but the team was MOST impressed with the Trustees and their knowledge of the college and of accreditation.) Thank you, bosses, for all of your work.

A special thanks goes to all of the faculty, administration and staff for revolutionizing the college over the past 10+ years! You did it! I also want to thank the team that wrote our very long, very detailed self-study and documented all of those pieces of evidence. Way to go!

Mostly I want to thank the public that stood by our college through the bad times in 2002. I hope you are as pleased as I am with what we have accomplished since then. NCCC enjoys a wonderful state and national reputation now and I have the HLC report to prove it. Thank you for believing in us!

And now work begins on our next reaccreditation. 2023 will be here before you know it. I can't wait!

If you would like to read the self-study report you can see it here: <http://goo.gl/dYzhhf>. If you would like to ask me a question or make a comment please email me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).