

I hold two degrees in mass communications which means I love a good story. I probably spend at least two hours or more a day reading newspapers, watching the news and even reading "Google Alert" emails about specific items I'm interested in, such as Kansas community colleges. Jen says I spend too much time on the news. Of course, she says that while she is doing a Sudoku puzzle, so let's not go there.

Recently there has been quite a story to read for those of us in higher education.

If you have been following the news lately you may have noticed a rather scandalous story involving a company that helps unscrupulous rich parents do whatever is necessary to get their children into elite universities across the country. And when I say, whatever is necessary, I mean illegal.

Six figure sums were exchanged in order to bribe an array of university employees and proctors of ACT and SAT tests, create fake biographies of the students, lying about the ethnicity of the student to get preferential treatment, and on and on. My personal favorite was faking photographs to show the kid was a student-athlete, when they were not. Wow.

The FBI has brought charges against those who offered the bribes, those who took the bribes, and the parents who put up the money and use the US Mail system to send the checks. As I write this, none of the students involved have been charged yet. From a "sensational story" aspect several famous actresses and mega-rich CEOs are included in the indictments, so that really kept the story "above the fold" as they say in the newspaper business.

The owner of the company that helped arrange all this called it "creating a side door" for his clients to get into these elite universities. To me it is funny that he mentioned the word "door", which I'll get to in a minute.

So is it worth it? Surely it is not worth it to bribe your kids' way into the elite universities. Some of those parents might have time to think about whether or not that is true, all while wearing an orange jumpsuit.

But is it worth it to go to an elite university? The studies are mixed on the topic. If you are already rich then no, it's not. The kids of the rich stay rich for the most part. What a shock, I know. Wealthy kids who want that big job have something much more powerful than an Ivy League degree. They have wealthy parents who have a network of powerful friends. A few phone calls and, well, there is a lot of truth to the adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know." The elite degree wasn't really needed to make that happen. I'm not saying kids of the affluent don't work hard to get what they deserve, I'm just saying that the studies show the elite degree wasn't the deciding factor in their success.

Where it does help is when someone from the lower classes gets into an elite school. There they make a big jump to a better life. OK, at least a more affluent life. Of course, if unethical rich parents bribe their kids into the elite colleges, then there are fewer seats for the deserving kid from the lower-middle class at the elite university. Hopefully, this case will cause the elite schools to tighten security and make admissions more fair.

The biggest difference maker in higher education doesn't seem to be where a degree comes from, but rather what the degree is in. If you have a degree in math or engineering, for instance, it really doesn't matter too much where that degree came from, you are going to make a lot of money. However, some

degrees, even if they are from elite universities, do not equate to a better salary. Degrees in the liberal arts, for instance. Like mass communications.

If the metric we are using to see what colleges help raise someone on the socio-economic scale, from lower class to middle class for instance, then look no further than your local community college. Community colleges get students trained for a variety of jobs that start in the \$50,000 range, such as our Occupational Therapy degree, or Surgical Technology.

So many students enter NCCC on assistance or are full Pell Grant eligible, meaning they are not the children of the rich. They leave with a degree or certificate that is their ticket to the middle class. In fact, NCCC leads the state in the percentage of community college students who earn a degree or certificate. We also lead the community colleges in percentage that land a job after graduation. I'm very proud of both of those facts.

There is a nickname for community colleges admissions. We are called, "open door institutions." We allow just about anyone in and work with them where they are, even if they are not yet college-ready. There is no need to bribe your way through the "side door." The door is open to you and your family. It's a door out of poverty and an important step on the path to the middle class and beyond.

All you or your kids need to do is come talk to us to get started. You don't even need to Photoshop your head on the body of an athlete to get in. It might be fun to look at though.

If you have any comments or questions about this article or anything else, please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.