

New beginnings are exciting and scary at the same time. This month I dropped my eldest daughter off at high school for the very first time. We were both excited and scared I think. It has taken a week or so but she has adapted to high school life for the most part. Adaptation is a skill that she will need as she moves through life and it's nice to see her learning how to do it.

Monday the 25th will begin the fall semester at Neosho County Community College. Soon students will come to us from all different walks of life, different areas of the country and sometimes, the world, and with all different levels of abilities. Some are quite independent, while others have never spent longer than a few nights away from home. That transition to college can be traumatic.

Think about it. Most of these new college students had a parent or guardian that made sure that they had clean clothes, got something to eat, got a good night's sleep, made sure they went to school and got their homework done. Now, it is up to the student to put themselves to bed, go to class, and do the required work. (Let's face it, they often take the dirty clothes home for the weekend.)

High school teachers often gave them time in class to do their assignments or at least start them. They saw these instructors every day and were reminded of papers, tests, and other course requirements. College instructors often do not give them time to work on assignments in class, or at least assume that they will do most of it on their own. The instructors give out a calendar of due dates the first day of class and expect the student to know them. They make time to meet with the student during office hours and let them know about tutoring services but it is up to the student to take advantage of those opportunities.

Their high school friends are gone, scattered to the four winds. Many of our students leave areas where they were the majority to where 95% or more of the population does not look like them.

At the residence hall even their childhood bed is gone, replaced with a standard bed. They are moved in with a stranger and must now negotiate with this stranger what to watch on TV or music to listen to, what level of cleanliness is acceptable, and when an appropriate bedtime might be among other cohabitation expectations.

They are asked to eat what is provided in the dining hall, and while it might be good, it is certainly not mom's cooking. And it's not just for lunch like in high school, but every meal.

All this change for an 18-19-year-old traditional student. That is a lot to adapt to in a short period of time for someone that has yet to develop all the emotional tools they will need in life.

Right now the national six-year graduation rate for public universities is 56%, meaning of those fulltime students who start a bachelor's degree only about 56% complete it in six years. In Kansas, that stands at 54.3% (2010 data from The Chronicle of Higher Education). It is amazing that it is this high to me. I am astounded that anyone can perform when ask to take on so much change in such a short length of time. Our students are amazing!

NCCC's Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) Student Success Index is 71.9% meaning that nearly 72% of our students either graduate or successfully transfer on to a university. I am quite proud of that figure,

because it represents that we are able to help our students make that successful transition to the college setting and help them complete their academic goal, be it a degree or certificate, or just taking a year's worth of general education classes before transferring on.

Even though we have about 260 residential students at NCCC, the vast majority of our students live at home. This means less adaptation is required. We have quite a few students who plan on going on to university in a year or two but they wanted to ease into that transition to a college/university setting as opposed to diving in head first. So, they went to their local community college. Oh, and they saved quite a bit of money on the cost of their education while they did it. (My long-time readers know I just had to put that last sentence in there.)

This Saturday, the 23rd is Move-In Day for our Chanute campus. Many students will come here full of excitement but also scared out of their minds. The faculty and staff do all they can to help them make a successful transition, while still expecting them to perform in the classroom. And year after year our students do a great job adapting and performing.

Abrielle, my new high school freshman, is getting the hang of her new school and is starting to enjoy it. I tell her, this is the first of many changes in your life. High school to college. College to work. Single to married (perhaps). Kid to adult to parent (maybe. By the way, I am hopeful that the "parent" adaptation is a LONG while off for her. I'm not ready to adapt to being a grandpa!). It will happen so quickly, all within a limited time. Adaptation is a lifelong skill.

If you have a comment or question about this column or anything about the College, please contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.