Announcement: Faculty Dinner, Oct 24th, Thurs, 6:30pm, MP Country Club

A couple years ago I was invited to attend a two-day conference in Washington DC, hosted by NACUBO (the college & university business officers’ organization). At that conference Dr. Joanne Conroy, Chief Health Care Officer for the Association of American Medical Colleges and an anesthesiologist by training, who has worked for the past decade on the reforms of the nation’s healthcare system, was the speaker for the first day. She spoke eloquently and clearly about why the healthcare system was nearing collapse, and what would fundamentally change in the next decade. Her message? At its most fundamental level the world of healthcare was changing from a time when it was mostly an art with some science, to a day when it is mostly a science with some art. The old healthcare system was based on the wisdom of individual doctors; everything else flowed from them – the diagnoses, the prescribed treatments, and the determination of whether the treatments were effective or not; even the decisions about what medical information was tracked and what was not – all of this came from the doctor.

In the new healthcare world the sheer scope of knowledge about the human body, disease, and available treatments has grown so great that the individual doctor can no longer bring to his patients the best care by relying on his own knowledge and wisdom. Now a mega computer, housing the collective learning from decades of rigorous medical research, can do a better job diagnosing and prescribing than the physician.

If you have doubts about this, read “The Checklist Manifesto” by Atul Gawande, a surgeon of international renown, who makes the same point.

So our conference speaker then turned to the obvious next question – how will the healthcare system change? She talked about the amazing ways technology will improve healthcare for people. We will take our own blood pressure and heart rate – even EKGs – with apps off our iPads. We will teleconference with our medical staffer from home or office, removing the waiting at the doctor’s office. And all the information about how we respond to medical treatments will continually feed this mega computer to turn the entire system into one gigantic medical research database.

But then she turned somber. The ones who are going to get it in the teeth are the docs. The older docs have been trained and have spent a career practicing as the “wise ones” - the fount of knowledge and the final authority. In the new world of healthcare they will not be the boss. There is a huge loss of status, not to mention changes in income and lifestyle, coming for doctors.

Why am I telling you this? Because of what happened the second day of the conference. Our primary presenter that day was Yoram Wind, Lauder Professor and Director for the Center for Advanced Studies in Management, Wharton School of Business. Yoram explained that at a fundamental level the exact same dynamic was taking place in higher education. Technology has made it possible for knowledge to be obtained instantaneously and w/o cost. Harvard, MIT and Stanford acknowledged this in the last 3 years as they have released their entire curriculum online, free. What used to be the “product” of those institutions was suddenly available to anyone in the world. MOOCs, despite all the hype, are nothing more than structured learning for self-directed students.
So back to Yoram. In the old model of higher education you went to university to study under a set of professors. They decided what you needed to know, and how best to teach you. The difference between a good college and a poor college was found in the quality of the education possessed by faculty – so universities touted where their professors earned their degrees and how many faculty had doctorates, etc. The system was based on the individually-held knowledge of professors. “I studied at “x university” under professor “y”.

But with the advent of increasingly standardized education – more and more schools using the same textbooks, standardizing curriculum at the course-level, rising transferability of credit from one school to another, the actual difference between an education at UT and one at UT-Tyler or even at NTCC was largely gone.

And the internet has now made knowledge universally available.

Who, this professor asked us, will see the greatest change as this phenomenon sweeps through higher education? It will be the faculty. And this is exactly what is happening. Despite the explosion of enrollment in college during the past 20 years, most colleges have similar numbers of full-time faculty. Instead of adding more professors, they have absorbed the growth with the use of adjunct instructors and overloads.

Current discussions surrounding MOOCs and the rapid adoption of online instruction center on the question – what is an instructor for? What is their role? Why do we need them?

There is an answer to this question, embedded in our new strategic vision. It is an answer that offers great potential for faculty of today and tomorrow. It is a role that preserves the centrality and dignity of a professor.

But it is a role that comes with somewhat different expectations. The new expectations are akin to that of coaches – expected to teach and evaluate learning, but also to motivate and shape students. And this comes at a time when motivating today’s students is a particular challenge, such a large challenge that it will be necessary for us to use every means at our disposal to leverage our efforts. What we need from the faculty is maximum creativity and maximum engagement. We need your collaboration with the administration and, more importantly, with each other.

I really like the way Chad Henry explained the vision this plan has for our role. He said, “have you heard it said that you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink? Well, that’s just not true. If you want a horse to drink you put salt in his feed to make him thirsty…it really increases the likelihood he will drink!”

We want to be a college that learns how to make students thirsty for learning. A&M makes students passionate about being an “aggie” and they do it very well. Can we make our students passionate about being curious, engaged, involved, and learning to think?

How will we make them thirsty? We want to create a place rich with educational opportunities and learning experiences. Daily hands-on learning happening in groups across campus, intensive learning
bootcamps focused on particular areas of knowledge and designed to entice student interest. Students who work on campus being exposed to times when their work and their classroom learning intersect. Guest lectures attended by students AND faculty/staff members, not because they are always tied specifically to a classroom learning objective, but because the presentation is of exceptional quality and worth our time.

Many of you do these kinds of things already, but are limited because of the overall pressures due to class load, etc. By working together, we can overcome these limits. You may only be able to devise truly amazing learning experiences a couple times a term. But together with your colleagues, we could have something happening every other day. You may only be available to your students during limited office hours. But a reinvigorated learning skills center could mean direct access to a faculty member all day every day and evenings, too.

We want to make NTCC known far and wide as an amazing place where students are absolutely engaged and involved – not just a few who join SGA, PTK or Honors, but a sizable and growing percentage of our student body.

I like the way it is stated in the vision of the strategic plan:

...rather than thinking of college as a place students go to listen to lectures and take exams, NTCC will become a community students join; a place of high expectations and high commitment among students, faculty and staff. Just like you don’t join the Marines but rather become a Marine; so too you don’t attend college, you become a college student. An education must change you, as well as inform you...

This is the same mission whether you teach Humanities or Law Enforcement; English Literature or Cosmetology; Psychology or Dental Hygiene...and so on.

This morning I am seeking to help you look at your profession from 50,000 feet. Change as big and rapid as we are undergoing in higher education today inevitably creates apprehensions and uncertainties. But it also gives us unprecedented opportunities to attempt good things that have not succeeded on the scale of our dreams in the past. Let’ s look around at the many great things we are doing and have done that are working. What can we learn from our own experiences? How does Doug Hoppock do it with Theatre? How does Winston McCowan do it with A&P? How about Sergio and Marcus and those crazy welding students? Why do our athletes earn higher GPAs than our average NTCC students? What are we learning from the Honors Program about student engagement? What did we learn this summer from the outstanding students who worked the Student Service Center and helped us get through Linsey’s maternity leave in Financial Aid? And what will work with the male students; who are not showing up, not staying when they do come? How can we create a place where students get so engaged that they can’t wait ‘till the next chance to be on campus or the next class they get to take?

I mentioned yesterday some of the specific things that we have already begun or will soon begin. You have the “Catch a Glimpse...” flyer, which has the official plan printed on the back. The items inside are
an incomplete list of various tasks that will unfold over the next few years. This is where we are going...come along on this incredible adventure. Let’s make the NTCC experience something genuinely unique, special, and life changing for all our students. It IS possible for faculty, administration, and board to share a laudable vision for our college and to work in tight collaboration to achieve it.

As I end my formal comments this morning, let me return to something Dr. Carter asked yesterday in the marketing meeting. She asked, are there plans to raise money which would be directed to the instructional needs of this college?

Here is the funding thread of our plans:

**Year One:** Branding project (Fall) and kickoff of Community Awareness campaign (drive enrollment and set the stage for what comes next)

**Year Two:** Community appeal to address $6M deferred maintenance needs

**Year Three:** $10-$15M Capital Campaign to enhance instruction and fund work scholarships

Immediately this fall our Advancement team will focus on raising funds where ever possible to: 1) assist with replacement of our SIS, and 2) fund our startup efforts to enhance the campus instructional experience.

So the short answer, Dr. Carter, is that instruction is the heart of this strategic vision and we intend to back up our plans with all the resources we can generate.

Questions?