

**President's Report**  
**State Board of Community Colleges**  
**Dr. R. Scott Ralls, President**  
**Friday, May 20, 2011**

I think it is a great blessing that commencement exercises occur in May, the same month when budget deliberations and our advocacy efforts reach a fever pitch. The ins and outs of budgeting can be challenging no matter whether you are an administrator in a state agency facing reductions or a legislator balancing where to cut, and the financial situation we face this year makes it particularly stressful for all involved. But no matter where you sit in that process, and no matter how challenging the days may be, there is no way you cannot be rejuvenated and reenergized by a community college graduation ceremony.

I participated in four last week, and no matter how many I go to in my career, I think there will always be a part of the ceremony that emotionally catches me. It's that point that inevitably happens in almost every graduation when you hear someone yell out "We love you, Mom," or "Way to go, Dad." And sometimes those cheers come from little voices. The first one I noticed this year was when I was with Dr. Mary Kirk at Montgomery Community College, and an older graduate walked across the stage and his young adult son let rip, "Atta boy, Dad."

Community college graduations are typically family affairs, and each year, I try to remind graduates to thank the fathers and mothers, wives and husbands, sons and daughters, or other family and friends who helped them across the graduation stage. But this year's graduations also made me think that beyond the caps and gowns, community college graduations have multiplier effects.

Here's what I mean by that. In economics, it used to be said that manufacturing jobs had what I recall as a 2.5 jobs multiplier effect. In other words, for every manufacturing job created in a community, approximately 2.5 additional jobs were also created in the form of supplier, business services, support utility jobs, etc.

A couple of years ago, I started thinking about the community college graduate multiplier effect when I met a graduating community college student whose story I often repeat, named Lori Pacheco. After a troubled childhood and adulthood, Lori was graduating from Cape Fear Community College as a USA Academic All-American Scholar with a 4.0 grade point, this after spending her entire time as a student also as a resident of a homeless shelter in Wilmington. The year after she graduated, five of her shelter mates enrolled at Cape Fear in the fall semester based on her inspiration. That's what I mean by the community college graduate multiplier effect.

And this year, the lives and experiences of graduating community college students and the impact they will have on family members, friends and colleagues – the multiplier effect – stayed on my mind.

It was on my mind on Mother's Day, when in addition to being thankful for my wife – the mother of my sons, and my own mother who has faced a very significant illness recently – I also couldn't help thinking about Brenda Lopez, our 2011 Dallas Herring Achievement Award winner – who graduated that morning from UNC Chapel Hill, twenty-five years after I graduated in the very same place. After she graduates from UNC Dental School in a few years, imagine what kind of multiplier effect she is going to have in encouraging others to follow her lead. What if she had not had the opportunity at Randolph Community College or with a mentor like Dr. Stuart Fountain?

It was on my mind the last two weeks when I heard from three veterans of our Minority Male Mentoring program who just touched base to let me know how well they were doing. One was Corey Harris, a student pioneer of Minority Male Mentoring and a Wayne Community College graduate, who like Brenda participated in the Mother's Day commencement in Chapel Hill as a newly minted UNC grad with a degree in business and entrepreneurship. He's off starting his own company, thanks to his start at Wayne and mentors and models like Ray Burell, Jimmie Ford, Ed Wilson and Kay Albertson.

And then I had lunch earlier this week with Joe Nevills, who graduated last week with an Applied Associate degree from Craven. He will return to Craven next year to work on transfer classes because he wants to keep moving forward with his education. Joe's is a classic community college story – difficult childhood, troubled youth and high school dropout. Personal connections with student leaders of the Minority Male Mentoring program at Craven led him there after he was laid off from his production job at Hatteras Yachts, and I'm proud to say he was helped with a Scott and Lisa Ralls Leadership Scholarship at one time in his student career.

Joe is a remarkable leader, in his community, with the Minority Male Mentoring program, and as the newly elected regional Vice President for the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. At lunch, we had one of the best discussions about the importance of college completion that I've ever been engaged in. I believe Joe said that his finding a community college was a blessing in disguise, something I've heard many other community college graduates say before. He talked about the impact of his education now on his own four children – all below the age of 13 – and his regular work, almost weekly, as a mentor at Ben Quinn Middle School. That's the community college multiplier effect.

Finally, last week, I received an e-mail from Dr. Ken Boham at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute that just said, “This is what it’s all about,” followed by several exclamation points.

The email forwarded the personal story of Sharon Malone, who entered a special certificate program at Lees-McRae College called the New Opportunity School for Women that whetted her educational appetite. “I never believed that I was smart enough to complete a degree, so at first I thought I would just go for a certificate.”

“One decision I made three years ago has changed my life, giving it purpose,” Sharon says. “I now know that I do not have to just settle for any job, but I have a choice to work at a business that is geared towards my career.”

Sharon found her way to Caldwell to begin her college career. “I owe my whole education to CCC&TI because without this institution I would not have finished so quickly and with so many positive experiences,” she now says. “The dedication that I had throughout my time at Caldwell has carried me to a university where I can show off what I learned (there).”

Sharon has since moved from the mountains and will complete the requirements of her Associate in Arts degree and graduate this summer from Wake Technical Community College. But she also just completed her first semester at North Carolina A&T State University where she finished with A’s and a 4.0 GPA.

Sharon was the first in her family to go to college, but she won’t be the last. “This has affected my whole family and their attitude toward education,” she says. “My son is now 18 years old. He along with my daughter Sarah, are attending Wake Tech. They are both working on an Associate in Science degree, and Anthony will also finish his Associate in Automotive Technology. My youngest daughter will start high school in the fall, and I will home school her through high school. My husband is also working to receive his high school diploma so we are all full time students, and I am so thankful. “

That’s the community college multiplier effect.

Well, now that graduation season is ending, we find ourselves still in budget season, and as we all know, it is a brutal one. The inevitable cuts we face will have impacts on students. For each one percent in budget cuts we face, it impacts our ability to serve 2,800 students, which is approximately our ability to serve the entire student body of Nash Community College.

Last fall, at the college where Sharon is completing her Associate degree, Wake Tech, they had to turn away 5,000 students who could not enroll in any classes. It concerns me to think of how many Sharons were in that group, as well as at the other North Carolina community colleges

that faced capacity limitations. But what really disturbs me is what we can't measure and count -- the impact on the community college multiplier effect. What will it be this fall as the new semester begins, and our colleges are more constrained than ever? What will be the fate of the Sharons, the Loris, the Joes, the Brendas and the Coreys? And the even larger question for us and our state leaders is how will North Carolina cope with the loss of the community college multiplier effect? Even in the warmth of commencement season, the question carries a cold dose of reality.