

This time last year I made mention of the remarks of a colleague that runs the community college system in the state of Virginia. His name is Glenn DuBois.

You may or may not recall that he characterized the role and mission of community colleges, in contrast to universities as the “emergency rooms” of higher education. Places where the doors are never barred, where the infirm (so to speak) can find help, no matter their circumstances. While we **do** have admissions requirements, our goal has always been to serve **everyone**, to meet them where they are and help bring them to where they want to be. A noble goal to say the least.

But over the past year, I’ve kept thinking about this analogy and I’ve come to the conclusion that not only can the healthcare system provide a window into what we do, how we do it, and even WHY we do it...but it can also be a predictor of where our own future lies.

So just imagine if you can, that our **students** are **patients**. Consider that a lack of education is an **illness** that’s in need of a remedy, therapy, or a cure. So those in need come to us and appeal to us for help, because they want to get better. They know there’s a malady in need of correction. Have **you** ever felt desperate for a cure? Desperate to get better, to feel better?

Are we **that** different from a hospital? We have **doctors**, right? ;-) We have **nurses**, right? We have individual records that are carefully protected and maintenance staff and IT workers, just like they do. We render services and send bills and work out payment arrangements. **And we help people become better.**

In a healthcare facility, the services rendered are all about addressing the needs of the infirm. Last month I was honored to attend the white honors ceremony for our nursing graduates. And quite frankly, I got emotional. Over the past couple years and months I’ve gained a new appreciation for the dedication and attitudes required to care for the ill. My wife’s grandmother over the past two years, at the age of 96 has

moved through various care facilities and hospitals and I've witnessed the selfless service that her caregivers provide. My **own** surgeries over the past year reinforced in me what the word "**care**" really means.

So ask yourself right now...do you believe that this level of care is what our students expect of us? Should we expect no less from ourselves? There is no Hippocratic oath for most of us, but should there be?

Some of you may recall Jerry Gee and his brief tenure as interim Vice President of Instruction here. I recall a conversation wherein he expressed relief that we don't deal with life and death decisions in higher education, so we should just relax and have fun. The implication is that maybe we take ourselves too seriously sometimes.

But it's possible to minimize the circumstances our students truly find themselves in. If we're really the higher education ER, then some of these students may be virtually on death's door when it comes to their education and prospects for a future.

This administration, above everything else, is committed to **valuing** people. Treating them with respect. This isn't just about students or just about employees, it's about a **culture of care**.

We spend a lot of time talking about plans we're making, but I believe that the culture and our collective attitudes are what define us, not so much a cool website, or a core theme, or a whitepaper, or a strategic plan.

And to quote my wife: talk is cheap. Without real action, words are just words.

Students are the reason we exist. And it's the respect for them and desire to mend them and make them well, to prepare them for **life** that is at the heart of our mission. And to provide, **just as the 4077th did**...the best care anywhere. At the end of the day, **all** the research and **all** the literature is clear: most students who struggle have a shot if we are engaged with them and leading them. Healing them, and caring for them.

I know some of you hear this as pure foolishness, that higher education is **not** healthcare. And that's fine with me. It's **not** the same. But that doesn't change the expectation that **we** have **administratively** regarding our desired approach to student engagement and their success: a genuine, sincere culture of care. And not just for them, but for each other.