



MJC Reflection

May 15, 2014

Graduation far exceeded my expectations! Even the weather cooperated and provided an ideal atmosphere for MJC's 92nd commencement celebration. The collaborative effort of the commencement work group, grounds, maintenance, Campus Safety, food services, custodial services, and media services was evident in every well planned detail. Even adding additional faculty seating was handled quickly and efficiently just before the processional. My deepest thanks and congratulations to the planners, musicians, participants, and doers that made this a great event for our graduates and guests. Many of our graduates crossed the stage with tears in their eyes and huge smiles on their faces. The joy of the moment was truly incredible.

We continued the completion celebrations last week at the technical education graduation ceremony. The tech ed team has developed a unique celebration that combines program graduation and a job fair. I stood quietly as I watched one of the graduates approach an employer booth, introduce himself, ask about job availability, share an overview of his skills and abilities, and produce a copy of his resume for review. In return, the student received a firm handshake and verbal assurance that "he was just the man they were looking to hire". As they set a time to meet regarding details, I walked to the next booth doing my best to contain my tears. I was incredibly honored to witness this transition from student to employee and will forever cherish this glimpse beyond completion that affirms the importance of our work within the community college.

The year-end reflection took a sharp turn today when I read an article from an MJC alum and CSU Stanislaus graduate who lamented "dredging through the chaotic mess that is Modesto Junior College." Ouch! Although it feels quite harsh, this message is an important reminder that what we do and say matters to students. Every interaction we have with students has the potential to change a life and provides an opportunity for us to exceed expectations. Many, many positive changes have been implemented to improve service to students, increase student learning, and support student success. However, we still have room for improvement and each complaint, as hard as they can be to hear, provides opportunity to make another change on behalf of students.

I recently received an email from a 2014 MJC graduate who is transferring to CSU Stanislaus. She said that she just wanted to say thank you for everything that Modesto Junior College has done to make her graduation possible. She noted having some of the best teachers over the last four semesters including Ross McKenzie, Heidi Meyer, Richard Wallace, Judith Cain, Cheryl Williams-Jackson, Jen Smith and that the list could go on and on. The student highlighted that faculty were very responsive to questions and concerns and were excellent at explaining concepts that are abstract and difficult. She also thanked the wonderful counseling staff and Eric Ivory who understood that she was coming to the end of a very long journey and ensured that she had everything ready for transfer. Then she praised the financial aid department exclaiming that she had only had positive experiences and that they had gone above and beyond to assist her. She closed the email with the following:

"So, it is with great sadness (and of course excitement) that I graduate today because I will miss MJC a lot. Stanislaus State has a lot to live up to since my experience at Modesto Junior College has been so positive. Please thank your staff for me since I am sure that you rarely hear about the compliments as much as you hear about complaints. I really wish I could have graduated with my bachelor's degree from MJC...I would have been very proud (just as proud as I am to say I have my AA from MJC!!)."

I have no doubt that our graduate will soon be making new connections with our colleagues at CSU Stanislaus and in two years will be expressing thanks to them. It is wonderful to have such a great university right down the road; one that is partnering with MJC and Stanislaus County Office of Education to jointly identify areas for improvement and implement

creative solutions to increase success, retention, and degree attainment.

*Far and away the best prize that life has to offer
is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.*

Theodore Roosevelt

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