

*have a weird holiday!*

## A Student's Reaction to COVID and Remote Learning

Written By: Dakota Cruz

This pandemic has taken a lot away from us as an entire country. Many of us have lost people close to us, while others have just been stuck in the same spot in life, not knowing what is coming next. But as a college student I personally feel the biggest loss we all have faced was the ability to go to school and learn. Online learning is completely different from in person; we all knew this when it started last march. But now that we are reaching almost a year of this pandemic it seems to be almost a joke in the faces of the students and staff.

Many students have conflicting feelings about online learning and how it has affected them in their education and the progress of their lives. Some students feel that online learning can be a great option for students who are trying to get a degree but they also have family and work. In a situation like that students can find it hard to have the obligation of going to class at a specific time. Not having this responsibility of going to class can give someone such as a single mother the ability to take care of her home life and go to school when she can find the time.

On the other hand, students who have been going to school their entire lives and went to college straight out of high school may

find it difficult to convert to online learning. There is something different when you have an actual person in front of you teaching and responding to your question in real time. When you have to learn from a computer screen it is difficult to get the feeling that the professors actually are taking their time with the information and care about our progress in the class.

The struggle of online learning has also affected the people trying to do the educating. Many of the professors feels that online learning is truly taking away from the education people are receiving, as though that online format is not an appropriate substitute. But again there are always people on both sides of an issue. One professor states "The blended classes with video lectures seem to be working out alright; in my classes the grade distribution looks pretty similar to what it would look like during a normal semester. My situation is slightly different from my colleagues, as I am giving my exams face to face. The few students who I

have showing up to my zoom lectures seem to like the format a lot; they have quite a bit of time for personal attention.

I definitely prefer teaching in person. There is nothing like actually being there," says Bob Buccella Professor of Anatomy.

Maybe the problem with students struggling is the fact that they are not used to being taught in such a way. Most of our lives we have encountered face to face education with a teacher right there. The idea of video lectures can help with the feeling of not being able to talk to your professor but there will always be the screen there and it won't feel quite like the real thing. It's al-

most like if you had the choice between a normal sugar cookie and a diet sugar cookie; of course you would take the regular sugar cookie over the diet one. But if there is only a diet sugar cookie offered, that is all you can receive.

Again, people have mixed feelings about this entire situation and how to better the learning experience we as students are receiving. Of course, we all want to be back on campus and go to school. There is no doubt that any of us would choose to struggle with our schooling. But that fact is that we have no idea when covid will end and how long that we will have to learn remotely. We can only hope that it will be over soon.



Photo Courtesy USA Today

## The Season of Transferring

Written by: Angelina Emmons

As the fall semester comes to a close and finals draw near, many students are beginning the process of transferring to another university after their time at NCCC. The process of transferring to another school, particularly with the extraordinary circumstances of 2020 and online learning, appears intimidating at first. Looking into colleges all over again and preparing the adequate information before deadlines initiates a sense of anxiety with most at the start of the journey. This article is meant to help establish transfer students into their first steps in the direction of this daunting yet rewarding task of pursuing a degree after their time at NCCC.

Most transfer deadlines for the next fall semester occur in the spring months before it. In order to have the best transfer process experience, the preparation should begin in the late winter months. This provides enough time to schedule meetings with advisors and plan the route best for you. A sense of control over the situation is the best aspect of beginning to inquire about transferring at the end of the year.

By already being enrolled into a college, students are more familiar with what they are looking for in their schooling and how they work under certain circumstances. This knowledge makes the second

school hunt easier, allowing one to narrow down their pool of choices. Once the transferee establishes what they are seeking in their transfer school, it is time to meet with an advisor.

Remote advisor sessions are available on the NCCC website under Transfer Services tab. This is the true beginning of the transfer process. Advisors help gain a student's bearings and know what their next step is. By holding off on a transfer conference, you're running the risk of missing deadlines and pursuing outlets which don't match with your needs.

The return to the college search continues after a meeting with your advisor. The search into schools involves investigations into their

curriculum for you major, their financial aid for students, and scholarships. The best way to gain a sense of the school during this era of virtual interaction is through scheduling a meeting with a representative with the school. Sign-ups for virtual conferences with Western New York Schools can also be found under the NCCC Transfer Services web page.

A search into the credits which transfer over from NCCC to the one of your interest is vital in understanding where you would stand once being enrolled as a student there. Banner Web curates a page which allows for a student to compare the credits they have to the ones which will transfer. This valuable page provides key information

to the transfer process. Transfer advisors are an email or zoom call away if the website causes any confusion.

Another pillar into which school you apply to is financial aid. By reaching out to a financial aid advisor from the schools you wish to apply to, a clear picture over what the university is able to offer appears. Financial aid contains the ability to make or break where your interest lies.

Now it is time to collect the required information and paperwork. Familiarize yourself with the due dates and deadlines of the colleges. Because all schools have their own unique transfer policies, preparedness maintains a valuable asset. Staying on top of when certain things are due and what colleges require eliminates unnecessary stress.

With the effort to stay home and the rise of internet usage for work, it becomes easy for us to huddle away. NCCC provides many efforts to ease the transferring process, by harnessing these advantages your success is in the spotlight. The most important part to being a successful transfer student is to start. When the anxiety flares over the idea of transferring, following the steps laid out above will help students gain a sense of control over the situation and their future.



Photo Courtesy Collegexpress

# Hello Students!

Congratulations! Soon you will complete the fall 2020 semester (the semester officially ends on Saturday, December 12th). Check with your professors about final exams. There is a chance you may have a scheduling conflict with final exam schedules depending on the courses you are taking. If you do have an exam conflict, discuss these conflicts with your professors immediately.

Also, have you made sure to register for spring 2021 classes, and have you made sure you meet all the prerequisites for your courses? After meeting with your advisor, you are still not registered for classes. To complete the registration process, you will need to sign in to Banner Web and officially register for your courses.

The end of a semester is a good time to reflect in order to be more successful next semester. Did specific habits help or hinder your progress? Who among your friends and family encouraged you in your studies? Who, on the other hand, discouraged you or distracted you? Did you use your time effectively, or did you waste a lot of time? Did you get to class? Were you on time and prepared and focused? Did you seek help from your professors or from academic coaches or tutors in the Academic Center for Excellence?

After reflecting on your answers to these questions, you should develop an effective plan for the spring semester. Identify the habits that you need to keep or develop and those that you need to break. Identify the people who are supportive of your studies and seek them out next semester. Create strategies that will help you better manage your time. Develop a plan for seeking extra help in courses that you will find challenging.

Enjoy the holidays, and the break, and return in January prepared to succeed!

Best Regards Always,  
~ The Student Success Committee of NCCC



## ALSO!

The Spirit needs a crew!



# NCCC Professors Come Through When Going Gets Tough

Written by Elexa Printup

What a year it's been! Between all of the new Covid-19 restrictions, hybrid learning, and dealing with personal lives; this semester has been a whirlwind of emotions- but we did it. As the Fall semester comes to an end, we should give a big appreciation to our faculty and staff for also pushing through this tough and odd semester. From teaching face to face, to having to come up with effective and engaging assignments made up strictly online -- it was probably not an easy thing to do. Our instructors are the first to take on a challenge like this. Years from now, 2020 will go down in history. It will be known as the year we all learned how to live life from a distance and to somehow continue to function as a society. To all of our educators, you are currently a part of large-scale systemic change and you are making history.

There are many great instructors here at NCCC and they have done a phenomenal job at adjusting to remote teaching. Samuel Hyman, student at NCCC, acknowledges his instructor, Daniel House, Applied Calc. He stated, "He is a very great teacher who always made sure to put students' questions and problems first on his list." He also has said that, "He is eager to help and answer any questions as well as posting each day's lecture for students to have access to at any time." This is greatly appreciated from students as it can be very stressful to be made to think that they are just a number in class. Being eager to help your students with any questions lets them know that you are open and available to them at all times.

Carli Peel, student at NCCC,

has acknowledged both Michele Hamilton, Education, and Douglas Regan, Education. She says of Michele Hamilton, "She is very patient with her students and will do anything to see us succeed." As for Douglas Regan, she states, "Half way through our Spring semester we had to go online and he made it very easy for us to do our work and still learn." She says of the two, "Both of these instructors have motivated me to continue my education here at NCCC."

Joshua Vantino points out what a great job Marissa Pylak-Surdyke has done. He states that, "Dr. Surdyke has done a phenomenal job this semester. In my interpersonal communication class, she has videos describing the week in assignments and she is very easy to work with and get a hold of." This is extremely helpful especially when you're not able to see your instructor weekly. Communication is important and being able to reach your professor at any given time is a great appreciation to students.

Jacob Scouten took a Film class in Spring 2020 and wanted to point out Suzanne Buffamanti. Spring was in the midst of the pandemic and halfway through the semester, NCCC was shut down and unexpectedly moved to remote learning only. Jacob states, "In a class very heavily based around discussion, she made great efforts to quickly rework the classwork so that we would further discuss on Blackboard and also made the harder to find films accessible via web on very short notice."

Students acknowledging instructors is a great way to show their appreciation of them. All year long these instructors strive to help us succeed without ex-

pecting anything in return. Although this has been a rough year, our instructors here at NCCC have embraced remote learning opportunities and have been extremely understanding

during these times. They have truly stepped up to the plate and showed us how much they care. They more than deserve the new-found appreciation being shown to them.

## The Spirit Staff Fall 2020

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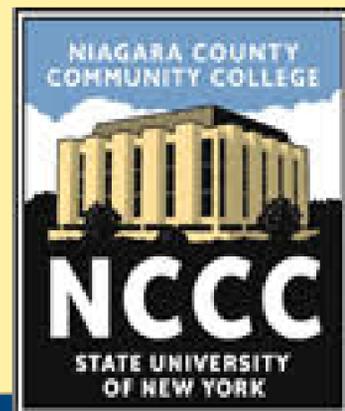
Angelina Emmons

Elexa Printup

Jacob Scouten

Jazmyne Simmons

Josh Vantino



# Pres. Murabito Envisions NCCC's Future

Written by Jacob Scouten

Late in 2019, William Murabito, bringing with him over fifty years of experience in various positions in the SUNY system, was appointed as President of Niagara County Community College, after two years as interim President. Over a Zoom interview, a Spirit reporter sat down to speak with Murabito over his plans for the school in its future.

Asked about the school's most important near-future matters for the school, Murabito stated, "the three items that I'm most concerned about are budget, and all colleges - not just us - are struggling. Part of that is enrollment, which has declined, and that affects the budget, and then there's new programs. We're engaged in something called Academic Program Prioritization; in that process, we're reviewing all of our academic programs to see which ones should probably go, which ones are fine, and which ones we need to expand." Murabito made repeated points about the difficulties of accomplishing these necessary expansions and alterations with an insufficient budget and challenges to the county on tax receipts, which has affected certain plans such as previously-

announced intentions to construct a new STEM building.

Having initially come to the position in light of incidents where, among other controversies, his predecessor's mockery of a sexual assault on campus and failure to inform the student body led to his resignation, improved transparency and openness with the student body is a large priority for Murabito. Via e-mail, PR Director Barbara DeSimone said of his policies, "I feel he has made great strides in this area," citing frequent conversations with Student Government members, hosting of regular "Town Hall" Zoom meetings, and making it easier to receive questions from anybody online.

Speaking on these additions, Murabito said, "when I first came, I think there were a lot of issues with distrust... A lack of transparency. I've been committed to sharing good news, bad news, questions about budget, I share that. The worst thing you can do is not be truthful." Murabito claimed that better opening communications has allowed for individuals to make problems clearer to administration, citing having done similar things in previous SUNY operations. "Sometimes it's an isolated

issue, and sometimes a pattern's developed... We can't rely on one method, and we can't rely on only saying things once. We have to repeat it." Murabito intends to continue to build upon these ideas moving forward.

Murabito's first full year as permanent president was shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2021 will require continuations and improvements of safety measures introduced in 2020. On learning from the past year's COVID response, he noted, "some people can work at home and be more effective, so we're looking at our policies on working at home to develop a more efficient workforce. Some students like remote learning, and some students hate remote learning... We have to match what students' interests are and the faculty's abilities to answer it." Murabito hopes that, with vaccine development moving forward, by the next Fall semester the school will be able to return to relative normalcy with the pandemic's lessons learned, and that starting planning ahead now is essential to a smooth transition, potentially with a large wave of returning and new students. "A lot of students out there didn't feel the campus is safe, taking a gap year. We have to reach them."

Some achievements Murabito takes pride in include reduction of budget deficit, and improved transparency and administrative relationships with students. He praised students and faculty for how well they handled the quick transition into Pandemic-friendly learning methods. "It wasn't easy," he said. He is also excited for planned economic development projects connecting students with local industries such as Stavatti Aerospace, social justice issues such as increasing the amount of black officers in local police forces, improved relationships with local high schools, including weekly presence of a staff member at Niagara Falls High School, assisting them with prospective enrollment, and a greater number of scholarship programs for NCCC students.

His formal inauguration date is still not known ("My wife keeps asking me the same question!"), but he believes that the virtual inauguration will likely take place in January.

Murabito also mentioned that he does read the Spirit, complementing the publication. "I look forward to it. It's a good newspaper... It's well written. I actually think that since I've been here, [the Spirit has] improved. Whoever is responsible for it, congratulations!"

# Safe Ways to Shop for the 2020 Holidays

Written By Joshua Vantino

2020 certainly has not been the year that anybody hoped for. For nine months now, we have been at war with a pandemic, losing out on any sense of normalcy, having restrictions on life as we know it, not having a normal semester, and not being able to see our friends and family the way we want to. With the holidays coming up fast, we all wish that we could participate in normal activities. Shopping is one of these activities. We tend to get very excited when we go shopping, knowing that we will be making someone happy when we get a gift that is special to them. Shopping isn't exactly the same this year, and now with cases rising again it is even more strenuous to go out to the stores to buy gifts. Here are some ways that you can shop safely for the holidays.

Some of us like to go Christmas shopping together to help think of some ideas and just have a shopping buddy. Many stores are closing or have intense restrictions on them, and with cases rising this may become worse. For example, Apple, one of the most popular gift vendors, has closed multiple stores across the country, and some are open only for express pickup or curbside pickup. Walmart, a previously 24/7 store, has limited their hours. These stores and many others have taken on new restrictions to ensure a safe environment but changed the way shopping is for us consumers. How do we combat this in a safe way? A convenient way you can shop with a friend or family member is via Zoom. You and your friend or family member can get connected on video chat share your screen, and shop online together.

This way, you can both take advantage of deals and still help each other out when it comes to finding gifts. Amazon has an entire gift section on amazon.com that updates every day with new deals. Best Buy and Walmart have had daily deals as well. By doing this, you are able to shop safely and also enjoy doing it with someone instead of staring at a screen by yourself unsure of what to get everyone. Another great tool to use while shopping like this is Honey. Honey works in your browser and looks for all of the different types of coupons you can use to save money on your online orders. This is a great tool to have to make sure you are getting the best price possible. One important thing that you need to pay attention to this year, however, is shipping dates. We're all used to waiting typically a week to 10 days for an item, or even two with Amazon Prime. But this year in 2020 fashion of course, these expectations can be different. Some products and websites are not delivering items until the week of Christmas, and it's only the beginning of the month. Make sure if you have ideas that you were looking at them frequently to make sure that you will get them in time.

stores already have this implemented, so look to see if the store you are shopping at is taking advantage of it. For example, if you were looking for an item that will not get shipped to your house until the week of Christmas, but it is available for pickup today, you can order it for pickup and get it delivered right to your car at the store. This way, you are not in contact with multiple people and you are in and out providing a safe and simple shopping experience. If you are someone who would rather not deal with packages, this is also a great idea for you. If you plan on making a shopping spree, you can simply order your items ahead of time and just pick them up all in one drive. Best Buy, Walmart, and Target all have designated curbside pickup parking spots. You simply type let the store know you have arrived with the app or an email and add a car description. Pop your trunk open, and there is your item!

This holiday season definitely isn't like any other. We all have to be safe and be careful. By shopping on line and taking advantage of curbside pickup, you are preventing yourself from being in a large group of people, and doing all of the hard work of shopping for the Holidays from the comfort of your home.

Another way you can shop safely this holiday season is taking advantage of curbside pickup. Many



Photo Courtesy the Irish Times

## Can It Really Be the End of the Semester?

Written by Jazmyne Simmons

Well the time is here, the time we've all been waiting on, the end of the semester. As we wrap up this trying semester that was an adjustment to students and staff, and as we wish we could all be winding down and calmly preparing for finals, we are really cramming and making last minutes adjustments to do amazing for all of our finals. To help make this as easy as possible lets go over a few ways to help ease your mind.

This time of year is already very stressful, but adding on the stress of final projects, papers, and exams can make times seem even more impossible. I want to give out a few helpful habits and tips that help me as a full time student and make learning and studying a successful and more bearable. Studying for me is something that seems so tedious and time consuming; however, it's something that has to be done. I personally love to write out flashcards and quiz myself in a study group of friends.

I asked a member of my study group Kayla Gates a student at ECC North campus what she seemed to be the most helpful for her and she replied "Studying with a group of friends whether it be on zoom, in person, or over one-on-one facetimes/video calls it will make it seem like an enjoyable experience, especially being able to connect with other students who may feel so alone and pressured; it takes a lot of weight of your shoulders knowing you're not alone.

Let's get into time management. This is a very important skill to have, especially when students have to study and cover so much material from different courses in such short periods of time. Personally I would highly recommend a planner and or a journal for just visuals of what your

week is looking like so you have a sense of what to prepare yourself for. The worst thing I've done was trying to get it all done in one night and cram it all in. That's just a cry for help. So know your classes, know the material, and plan out your papers, study sessions, and time for yourself.

The mental aspect of having to maintain good grades can be very hard, especially if you have to worry about school, work, family. That can easily be a huge way to forget about yourself. During times like this you want to remember to give your brain a rest. A brain under stress is never a brain that will work to its full potential. Give yourself time, the energy you give yourself students will be what you put out into your work.

Mental health is something that can easily get drowned out when an individual is so overwhelmed and overworked so the time management is actually very important. Managing your time isn't only for planning out how you're going to get your work done but however also how to ease your mind and give yourself some time to breathe and collect your thoughts. Personally myself i am someone who struggles with anxiety and that's something that's no secret to many especially college students so sometimes I like to do an "escape break." That's where you want to completely stop your mind, slow down everything racing around in your head, take four deep breaths and try to bring yourself back to reality; it is a task that seems to help me.

The end of the year can be all that we make it, so remember that as much as we want to be successful and have that picture perfect 4.0, whatever grade that you achieve, as long as you put your horns hard work and full potential into it, that's what matters most. As always we're in this together, Thunderwolves!

## NCCC Unveils New EOP Office and Collaboration With Niagara Falls HS

Written by NCCC PR Department

Sanborn, NY – While the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has been around since former New York State Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve started the program in 1967, it is relatively new to Niagara County Community College (NCCC). The program started at NCCC in August of 2016 with the goal of providing academic workshops, tutoring, counseling, advisement and financial assistance to historically underserved students who require additional academic support.

Currently the NCCC EOP has funding through the State University of New York (SUNY) Office of Opportunity Programs to support 70 students. As of Tuesday, November 17, EOP students have a brand new space to call home as NCCC cut the ribbon on a larger, more student-friendly office. More important than the office is the people who run the program on campus. As an NCCC Alumna and former EOP student herself, Angela Jackson, EOP Coordinator at NCCC has a valuable perspective when it comes to the population she serves. "Being able to work at my alma mater is awesome in and of itself, however being a former EOP student and being able to oversee and help shape the new EOP at NCCC was a dream opportunity for me," says Angela.

Not all high school students receive the guidance and support needed to pursue their goals in higher education, or may not feel they are "college material" according to Angela. Because of her own experience, she recognizes the importance of having a presence in high school to illustrate possibilities firsthand. As part of her duties, Angela will now spend one day a week on-site at Niagara Falls High School allowing her to have 1-on-1 time with students to share information about EOP and inform students on exactly what services may be available to them.

While COVID has transitioned many of the services typically offered on-campus to a virtual experience, EOP is still very active in making a positive impact in the lives of the students it serves. Angela notes that colleague Ted Mallwitz, Academic Support Specialist is amazing at disarming students and creating a safe space for them while directing them to the appropriate resources needed to assist them in their academic journey. When asked about the vision of the future of EOP at NCCC, Angela envisions the program doubling the population it serves and hopes to provide even more financial support for students. "The program has survived 52 years; I hope we have another 52."



Angela Jackson, NCCC EOP Coordinator with student

## Registration Questions Answered!

*I am Planning to Graduate in December. What Should I Do?*

- Please submit a Graduation Application. The deadline to file for December graduation is December 11.
- Apply through Banner Web:
  - o Click on “Student & Financial Aid”
  - o Click on “Student Records”
  - o Click on “Graduation Application – Submit.”
  - o Verify the information you entered is correct and click “Submit Request”
  - o If you plan to earn more than one degree and/or certificate in the Fall semester, please submit a graduation application for both.

*When are Final Grades Posted and How Do I Get Them?*

- Final grades will be available online the evening of December 21. You must log into Banner Web to obtain your grades. Grades are not mailed. You will find your final grades under the Student & Financial Aid menu, then click on Student Records and choose the link to Final Grades.

*When Will my Transcript with Final Grades be Sent?*

- If you submitted an online request for an official transcript that includes final Fall grades, the transcript will be sent after final grades have posted on December 21 and prior to winter recess.

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## President Murabito Brings Wealth of Experience to NCCC

*Written by Alexis Workman*

The traditional model for a college president has remarkable staying power. A college president carries a tremendous amount of responsibility while focusing on leadership, planning, fundraising and developing in-depth knowledge. A college president is always a leader first. The President is expected to demonstrate those leadership skills necessary for the dynamic pursuit of the goals and objectives embodied in the mission of the college. The President is also expected to understand the higher education needs of the college's service region, work with the Board of Trustees to develop proposals for meeting those needs, and provide leadership to foster cooperation between campus and community in fulfilling the University's teaching, research, and public service responsibilities. The President is expected to demonstrate those leadership skills necessary for the dynamic pursuit of the goals and objectives embodied in the mission of the college. The President is also expected to understand the higher education needs of the colleges service region, work with the Board to develop proposals for meeting those needs and provide leadership to foster cooperation between campus and community in fulfilling colleges teaching, research, and public service responsibilities.

Our president, Dr. William J. Murabito was appointed president at Niagara County Community College in December 2019 after serving as interim president since September of 2017. According to Niagara County Community College website, Dr. Murabito has held the role of Interim President at SUNY Cobleskill in 2002, Sullivan County Community Col-

lege in 2011, and SUNY Morrisville in 2013 and as CEO/Officer-in-Charge at Rockland Community College in 2003. Prior to those appointments, Dr. Murabito held several positions at SUNY System Administration between 1983 and 2002, including Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Executive Director for University Technology Colleges and as Associate and Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Life. His volunteer activities include serving as a member of New York State Commission of National and Community Services since 1994 and chair from 1994-2007, and the New York Special Olympics Board of Directors from 1984-2004 and its chair from 1991-1997. Murabito received Volunteer of the Year for the City of Albany for his work as chair of Albany's Promise, and the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year Award in 1998 from the State University College at Buffalo. He holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Illinois, an M.S. in Student Personnel and Guidance from SUNY Albany, and a B.S. from the State University College at Buffalo. There is also a message that he states out to students, “NCCC has one focus—you. When you succeed, we succeed as a college and the community improves. A Niagara County Community College education opens the door to opportunities in the workforce or an easy transfer into four-year schools. We are committed to serving our community with programs, courses, services, and events that provide successful transfer, career preparation and workforce entry, college readiness, personal enrichment, and community programming.” Developing and implementing a progressive and community responsive College philosophy, including a comprehensive

strategic plan which details the institutional mission, goals and objectives, priorities, and resources, for the current and long-range needs of the district.

The President of the College is the chief executive, administrative, and education officer of the community college district and derives authority from, and is responsible to, the Niagara County Community College Board of Trustees. The President's primary responsibility is to provide vision for the College and continuous leadership and direction for the planning and operation of all aspects of the College's programs and services in conformity with Board and the rules and regulations, and State law. Developing, maintaining, and evaluating the academic programs and student services of the College and creating a climate which enhances student learning, stimulates creative approaches to teaching and learning, and motivates both staff and students to optimum achievement; Developing

and maintaining an appropriate administrative organization to insure effective and efficient management of the College and its resources; Recommending policies for board action and implementing those policies adopted by the Board. Developing and maintaining a personnel operation which includes the recruitment, selection, development, compensation, evaluation, and continuation of all College staff. Maintenance and efficient use of existing institutional resources and the creation of new resources; Internal and external communications, including keeping the Board informed, being the College's chief spokesperson, and representing the College to the general public; Providing for the preparation and submission of all reports required by local, state, and national agencies; representing and actively participating in appropriate local, state, and national efforts to promote the interests of the college.



*NCCC President William Murabito*