

What I Learned At MCC – Christine Abbott

I know many of you have heard of the book titled “Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Well, the topic of my talk (I guess it’s an essay now since we can’t meet in person!) is Everything I Need to Know I Learned at MCC.

My interview for a teaching position in the Mathematics Department was the first job interview I ever had. I was finishing up graduate school at Syracuse University and really didn’t want to leave Syracuse. Not a surprise to those of you who know me! My advisor encouraged me to go to the interview and assured me MCC was a great place to teach if I was fortunate enough to be offered a job there. I reluctantly agreed and figured at worst, the interview would give me some valuable interviewing experience. After the interview with the department search committee, Bill Setek walked me to the dean’s office for the next part of my interview. As we chatted in the elevator, he told me he was an SU fan. I was so excited!! At that point I thought maybe this IS actually a good place to work, if there are people here who are also SU fans! To my surprise, I was offered the job despite coming directly from graduate school with little teaching experience. Although I really didn’t want to leave Syracuse, I thought I would stay at MCC for a year, gain a bit of experience, and then look for a job in Syracuse. Thirty four years later, I am now retiring from MCC. I guess I ended up staying for more than one year!

There are so many reasons why I stayed at MCC for my entire career and one of the reasons is because I was constantly learning something, whether it was how to be a better mathematics teacher, how to be a better leader, or how to be a better colleague.

At MCC, I learned I had the best colleagues who were always willing to share course materials with anyone teaching a new course or someone who just needed a different perspective on how to teach a particular topic. I am so thankful for all the help my colleagues have given me during my career and I wouldn’t have had the successful career I did without them. My colleagues in the Mathematics Department are well aware of the issues I have had with technology from repeated problems with my computer to losing battles with the electric stapler in the department office. I still haven’t mastered that “defective” device! I am convinced it was never operator error and that stapler just didn’t like me! I apologize to all who had to hear me cursing that stapler or my computer!

At MCC, I have had many opportunities to grow professionally and for that I am so grateful. Through my roles as Faculty Senate President, chair of the Mathematics Department, Interim Dean of Liberal Arts, co-chair of our Middle States Reaccreditation, co-chair of the College’s United Way Campaign, Teaching Director for the Faculty Association, and chairing the Search Committee for the Provost/Academic Vice President, I have learned leadership skills that I never expected I would learn. It has been a privilege to work with so many dedicated, talented, and passionate colleagues and I have learned something from each and every one of you. I learned from my colleagues to value the opinions of others and to work collaboratively towards a common goal. I appreciate the opportunity to have worked with others who have different opinions and to respect those differences. Through all the numerous committee’s I have served on, I am honored to have worked with members who brought enthusiasm and teamwork to the group.

At MCC, I had the privilege to attend many national and state mathematics conferences. When talking to faculty at other institutions it was clear we have much better working conditions and professional

development opportunities at MCC than they did, which further confirmed I chose the right place to work. I was proud to hear faculty at other institutions comment how lucky I was to work at MCC.

At MCC, I became a textbook author. I am so grateful one of my former colleagues at MCC, Allen Angel, offered me the opportunity to become a co-author with him on one of the most successful Liberal Arts Mathematics textbooks. Becoming a textbook author has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had professionally.

At MCC, I learned how important it is to be organized and to manage my time while serving different roles. There were many years where I had to balance working on the next edition of my textbook, teaching full time, and being a mom to two wonderful sons. I know there were a few days when I was a little cranky trying to juggle everything. Ok, perhaps I was a lot cranky some days! I appreciate their support, encouragement, and understanding and wouldn't have managed it all without their help.

During this last semester at MCC, I unexpectedly learned many new skills as we transitioned to remote teaching. Like many of you, I spent numerous hours learning how to use Zoom to deliver lectures to my students in order to try to best replicate for them being in the classroom. While I much prefer to teach in the classroom, I have learned there is a benefit to learning how to use Zoom – virtual happy hours. With my friends of course – not with my students!

Speaking of friends, at MCC, I met an amazing group of friends, including my closest friend, that I know will all be lifelong friends. I am so grateful for all of them. The decision to retire was very difficult because of these wonderful friends. I have so many good memories with them including laughing so much in a colleague's office that others would come out of their offices to hear about what we were laughing at.

At MCC, I learned the value of serving the department, the College, and our students. For those of you in the earlier stages of your career, take time to get involved with college wide committees. Doing so was one of the best decisions I made at MCC. It is a tremendous way to grow professionally, meet colleagues from other departments, and it will allow you to feel rooted in your role at MCC. I know the last few years have been a bit challenging for faculty and staff. I am proud to know despite those challenges, I was part of a faculty who always put students first. For those of you who are closer to retirement, you will remember all of your good experiences and the relationships you developed much more than the challenging times!

At MCC for the last 34 years, my academic year started with Dove Bars at the All College Day Picnic and ended with the FA party. But I decided it's time for another chapter in my life. I have a lake house on Oneida Lake in Syracuse and am moving there sometime this summer. I still have four years of NCAA college athletic eligibility so maybe I'll realize a dream of mine of playing basketball for the SU women's team! We all know that's not going to happen for many, many reasons! I do hope to get a position with the SU athletic department as either a mathematics tutor or as an academic advisor for the athletes. Having a position like that would allow me to combine my interest and experience in academics along with my passion for SU Athletics and give back to the university which helped prepare me for my teaching position at MCC. Regardless, I will have the opportunity to go to all home games!

As I reflect on my career at MCC, I am so thankful I accepted this job, which became a career, and stayed for much more than one year. Rochester became my home and where I raised my family. I will miss

working with such a talented, dedicated, and innovative group of colleagues. Having the opportunity to work with all of my former and current colleagues is the biggest reason I stayed at MCC for my entire career. Those relationships and memories are what make all the hard work worthwhile. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with and learn from all of you! It's also an honor to be selected for the Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series. Carmen was a wonderful colleague who is greatly missed by all.

I feel lucky to have spent so much time at an institution where we have an impact on the lives of so many students. Thank you for taking the time to read this and stay safe and healthy. A colleague once told me "the journey is more important than the destination". Those words are so true and words I will never forget. I hope your journey is as rewarding as mine.