



NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

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The power of 'yes'

By NCTA NEWS

CURTIS, Neb. (August 17, 2022) Little did Jennifer McConville of Indianola know when she began a doctoral program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2014 that a commencement address would mirror her own story.

"Think about the opportunities that you are given and even if you don't feel qualified or you feel afraid of something new, you never know where the transformative power of saying 'yes' will lead you," was the message which rang through the Pinnacle Bank Arena at the UNL ceremony last Saturday.

"The Transformative Power of Saying Yes" was delivered by Susan M. Swearer, Willa Cather Professor and chair of the UNL Department of Educational Psychology.

McConville, who is associate dean of the NU system's Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, was one of six graduates receiving a Doctor of Education degree.

Her doctoral dissertation, completed earlier this summer, was a real-life account from the past several years. The title – *"Leading Community Colleges Through A Pandemic: The Lived Experience of One Administration During the COVID-19 Pandemic."*

One of her mentors who shared the pandemic leadership challenges and successes was Larry Gossen, Ph.D., dean of NCTA.

Gossen and his wife, Fay, who live in Curtis, attended Saturday to witness McConville wear her black tam with the gold tassel (for doctoral graduates) and receive the ceremonious blue hood designating the Department of Educational Studies.

"Jennifer persevered through the challenging periods of safeguarding the health and safety of our campus population, while simultaneously working on a doctorate program and juggling responsibilities with her family," Gossen said.

UNL administrators, faculty, and colleagues helped with commencement where the university conferred 632 degrees, including to some undergraduates and graduates who were unable to participate in the previous in-person events due to the pandemic.

Saturday's ceremony was particularly significant as her four children, husband, Kirk, mother, Mary Rittenhouse, and other relatives were able to attend.

"I went back to school because I wanted a better life for my kids. Hearing them cheer for me while I walked across the stage was monumental," she said.

McConville started at NCTA as agribusiness management faculty, then became associate dean in 2015.

As NCTA's fall semester begins August 22nd, it will be a new chapter for McConville's family as her youngest child, Gracelynn, starts her college career at Western Nebraska Community College.

McConville says by saying "yes" to challenges and opportunities, many doors were opened when she herself first started college at

"Never say never. Going to school with young children was extremely challenging, I'm not naturally a good student so there was a lot of studying time throughout the years. Going to college with active high schoolers is even more challenging!

"But I believe in always having a goal. Sometimes I had to reassess and change my goal based on circumstances or resources, but I am always working toward something that will help me take another step forward."



Dr. Jennifer McConville



Jennifer McConville's four children gathered August 13 to see her receive a doctorate in education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. (McConville family photo)

Online article: <https://go.unl.edu/itkz>