

# Cody Nicholson earns high school, associate's degree in senior year

By Russ PANKONIN  
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Saying Cody Nicholson of Imperial set a new standard for higher education for Chase County Schools (CCS) students would be an understatement.

A member of the Class of 2011, the 18-year-old earned his CCS diploma at the end of the first semester in January.

Friday will mark another crowning



**Cody Nicholson**

achievement for Nicholson when he receives his Associates of Arts (A.A.) degree from Mid-Plains Community College (MPCC).

Nicholson took full advantage of the Campus Connections program offered as a joint effort by CCS and MPCC.

The program allows high school juniors and seniors to take CCS classes as dual-credit classes. These classes count both for high school and college credits.

CCS guidance counselor Marcie Yaw said Nicholson took the program to the next step, by finishing his A.A. degree along with his high school degree.

"And he did it by never setting foot on campus," she said, referring to MPCC's campuses in McCook and North Platte.

Nicholson said when he was a sophomore in high school, representatives from MPCC and the high school came to the students with a proposal.

The "proposal" Nicholson speaks of is the option to take dual credit classes that count for both high school and college credits. Nicholson said it was a proposal he "just couldn't turn down."

Not only do the students get

dual credit for the classes, they get them at a reduced cost, said Brenda Ledall, MPCC's Imperial campus coordinator.

A credit hour at MPCC runs \$89 per hour. That compares to nearly \$200 at the University of Nebraska.

Students who get an A or B in the classes get 50 percent of their tuition back from CCS. Plus, they save time by getting required college courses out of the way.

Students don't have to pay for text books and courses are usually taught by familiar teachers.

"Essentially, I think MPCC and the high school did everything but roll out the red carpet for its students. All anyone had to do was step up, apply themselves and make it happen," Nicholson said.

He said the first two years of college are mainly devoted to taking mandatory general education classes. "Basically, it's high school all over again," he said.

Nicholson also said that if he would have started taking dual credit classes earlier, the process would have been easier as he would have had more time in which to complete the courses needed for both a high school and two-year degree.

Yaw said Nicholson also took advantage of online classes and College Level Examination Program tests that allows students to test out of required courses.

Nicholson was quick to give credit to the college and the high school for their efforts in helping him find success in his educational journey.

"MPCC and CCS were always there when help or advice was needed," he noted, "But ultimately, it was hard work, dedication to a goal, delayed

gratification and respecting the counsel of people who have 'been there, done that' that really kept me going," he said.

Nicholson advised high school students that "college will never get any cheaper."

Ledall said Nicholson set a great example for how a high school student can start on his or her college education while in high school, while also saving money.

He exceeded even MPCC's expectations for what a high school student can accomplish, by earning both degrees at the same time, Ledall added.

She said the Campus Connection program is a real asset to the community by extending learning opportunities without leaving town.

## What's ahead for Nicholson

Nicholson is concentrating his current efforts on developing a tool to help Nebraska voters make informed decisions when going to the polls.

Utilizing the web, he wants to create a site that will cover all 93 counties of Nebraska. While state and national races get lots of attention in the media, local level races fall below the radar.

His plan is to better inform local voters by outlining what offices are being elected, who the candidates are, along with a profile so voters can compare candidates.

He will be looking for people in each county to help compile the information.

He plans to have the site operation for the 2012 Primary elections next May.

If the model proves successful, he wants to expand it to other states.

*(Contributions from MPCC communications department were used to compile this story.)*

