

Maryville Daily Forum column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Our students have arrived and the 2011-12 academic year is in full swing at Northwest Missouri State University. The campus is alive with activity and spirit, and our city is reinvigorated with the energy our students bring. It's a great feeling!

Our employees and I kicked off the year Aug. 24 with our all-employee meeting. There, we welcomed our newest employees and outlined our strategic plan for the future. We also celebrated the accolades and accomplishments we enjoyed during the last year. From securing \$1.9 million in grant applications and receiving the President's Higher Education Honor Roll for Community Service to numerous academic and athletic accomplishments, all of us – faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members – have a hand in helping Northwest succeed.

A week ago, of course, our students began arriving, and we welcomed a record 1,500-plus freshmen to Northwest. From first-generation college students to second or third-generation Bearcats, they come from all over the world and are diverse as ever. As we noted at our all-employee meeting, Northwest students represent all but three states (Connecticut, Delaware and Vermont), most of our freshman class was born in 1992 or 1993, and just a few incoming college students know how to write in cursive. Their world is evolving faster than ever.

Last year, our theme was "responding and transforming." Now, with the new academic year, it is time for us to look forward to "executing and succeeding" on strategic themes of addressing academic programming, our learning environment and community impacts.

We must continue our strong performance in the areas of freshman success, graduation and placement. At Northwest, we boast a 74 percent retention rate, considerably higher than national and regional averages. About 58 percent of Northwest students graduate in six years, a rate that is 13 percent higher than the national average. About 93 percent of our graduates find employment or continue their education within six months of graduation.

We also were pleased to receive notification recently from our accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, of Northwest's improved financial condition. This is due to our efforts in sound enrollment management and aggressive management of our expenses resulting in cost reductions – while our state funding has dropped to about 35 percent during the last two years.

We've strengthened our financial position. We're achieving high levels of academic success, and we've reached high levels of employee satisfaction. In a recent survey of our employees, about 68 percent of faculty and about 78 percent of staff said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences at Northwest.

But there are improvements to be made. We will continue to listen, take input very seriously and follow through.

As you see Northwest students throughout the town and in businesses, I encourage you to greet them, engage them and tell them how proud we are to have them in our community.

At the same time, I look forward to seeing you at many of our events throughout the year. Our Bearcat soccer team begins its season with home games this weekend at Bearcat Pitch, and our Bearcat football team kicks off its home schedule Sept. 10, in conjunction with a weekend of activities to honor Mel and Carol Tjeerdsma.

Our Department of Art opens its year of exhibits Sept. 12 at the Olive DeLuce Gallery with the annual faculty art exhibit. We also recently announced our Encore series schedule, which begins with The Second City performance Sept. 14. "Almost Maine" starts our theater department's schedule of main stage performances, Sept 29-Oct. 2.

We at Northwest are looking forward to another year of great success – 107 and counting! We hope you will join us in continuing to ensure an enjoyable, comprehensive and life-changing experience for our students!

Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest, visit www.nwmissouri.edu.