

**Maryville Daily Forum column**  
**Thursday, Feb. 7, 2013**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

Much has happened since my last column in January. We released peer-leading results on student engagement measures, refinanced another set of bonds yielding more savings and announced significant improvements for our dining services. Our cheerleaders returned home with their third national championship in four years – and the institution's fifth since December 2009 – and Gov. Jay Nixon visited the campus to celebrate Northwest's sustained excellence.

The higher education sector, it seems, is under siege. The popular media portray us as being out of touch academically, out of reach financially, driving up unwarranted student debt and not taking care of taxpayer dollars. Moody's Investor Services recently downgraded the entire sector of higher education. If you listen to some, politics is entering into a variety of areas across the sector and a form of anti-intellectualism is taking hold.

And, of course, the higher education sector is changing dramatically – academic program design and delivery modes, financial models, enrollment trends, admissions strategies – and the list goes on.

Yet through it all – including 108 years of serving this region and well beyond – the investment in Northwest Missouri State University and higher education as a whole continues to be a sound strategy. The most recent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for ages 25 and above shows unemployment rates for high school graduates at 8 percent, associate's degrees and some college at 6.9 percent, and bachelors and above at 3.9 percent.

We Bearcats treat such investments as Gov. Nixon is proposing in his Fiscal Year 2014 budget with gratitude, and with a focus on not just being efficient, but being effective and strategic. To be sure, we have continuing challenges as we move ahead. But, like we always do, we will work collectively to address these issues and ensure we commit to using taxpayer's dollars in the best manner possible as we deliver continuing value and quality to our students and others we serve.

The proposed 4.3 percent budget increase for Northwest is tied to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education-approved Performance Funding targets. These were created by a bi-partisan and cross-functional subcommittee consisting of constituents from the House and Senate, Missouri Department of Higher Education and representations of two- and four-year schools. The proposed increase, if ultimately approved, will help us address our mission of focusing on student success – every student, every day. This represents an investment in higher education and our state's future. That's something that I know we can all agree upon – higher education should be viewed as an investment, not a cost. I am confident the General Assembly views higher education the same way and as a key economic engine for our state.

Through difficult but strategic decisions and especially an unwavering focus on what's best for our students, we have created a sustained path of successes. These range, for example, from enhanced academic performance and programming initiatives to living within our means fiscally and enhancing our financial position. They include sustained performance that outpaces our peers on measures of student success such as retention, graduation, satisfaction and engagement, and addressing student enhancements such as upgrading our wireless network and our recently announced dining upgrades. They include enhancing revenue-generating funding streams and moving toward a comprehensive capital campaign.

We are proud of our sustained, positive and peer-leading performance, and will not let up. Support for higher education in the form of appropriations and capital bonding issues will help us help students, our state and our society. That's the Northwest way.

In the coming months, I will discuss what we are doing in Bearcat land to be an outlier on the good side of the fence. I will address how we are enhancing academic programs while focusing on retention and graduation with retained quality standards, and how we are tied to professional standards and have the voice of employers and graduate schools as part of our listening and refinement processes. I'll address how we have bucked the Moody's industry downgrade, retained a stable rating and continued to focus on strengthening our financial position while remaining affordable with quality. I'll address how we are refreshing our services and learning environment across all areas of the institution and how we are assisting with community impacts. And I'll address what we are doing to plan for the institution's largest comprehensive campaign that will ask for Bearcat support from private and public sources.

Thanks for your role in helping us realize our mission of focusing on student success – every student, every day.

*Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest visit [www.nwmissouri.edu](http://www.nwmissouri.edu).*