

**Nodaway News Leader column**  
**Thursday, Feb. 7, 2013**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

Much has happened since the calendar rolled over to 2013, and our students returned to Northwest Missouri State for the spring trimester. 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 – the institution's fifth since December 2009 – and Gov. Jay Nixon visited campus to celebrate Northwest's sustained excellence.

Certainly, at Northwest, we believe we have a story to tell that bucks what critics of higher education are saying. 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. 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.

Moody's Investor Services recently downgraded the sector of higher education as a whole. Individually, 91 percent of higher education and not-for-profits were downgraded in 2012, while about 80 percent of all organizations rated were downgraded in 2012. In issuing the downgrade, Moody's pointed to negative accreditation actions taken against U.S. colleges and universities, which have increased by almost 50 percent during the last three years, to 79 actions last year. In order to demonstrate quality and performance standards in U.S. higher education, accreditors are citing universities for a broad range of issues that include deficiencies in governance, integrity and assessment of student learning outcomes. Failure to comply with these standards can lead to, at worst, a withdrawal of accreditation, which would result in a loss of funding.

Northwest, I'm here to tell you, is not among those universities. We continue to manage with a balanced and holistic approach that addresses revenues, expenses, investment and savings to strengthen our financial standing as well as the institution to provide for strategic investment in its programs, employees, facilities and services.

In November, Moody's reaffirmed Northwest's "stable" rating based on our financial performance, and said the university's "practice of careful budgeting and proven record of cutting expenses is a key credit strength given past pressure on state funding as well as current enrollment pressures." Furthermore, last fall, Northwest received a reaffirmation of its accreditation with no follow-ups scheduled until 2018-2019. The results of our annual audit, completed in October, resulted in the designation of a strengthened financial position, and we've addressed key findings of a state audit released in fall 2011.

Here are a few more examples of Northwest's financial impact:

- By refunding revenue bonds, Northwest has realized significant cashflow savings of more than \$10 million.
- Grant awards brought in \$1.7 million in 2012 to support University programs. Forty-five percent of our applications were funded, exceeding the national average of 25 percent, and Northwest saw a 200 percent increase in the number of grants tracked through our grants coordinator between 2011 and 2012.
- The Small Business and Technology Development Center, based at Northwest assisted with 21 business start-ups and one business purchase in 2012. It helped create or retain 357 jobs in northwest Missouri, experienced an increase in sales of \$15.8 million and received loans and investments totaling \$14.1 million.

- Gov. Jay Nixon has proposed a 4.3 percent budget increase for Northwest that is tied to five specific performance funding targets. Northwest met all five of its performance funding measures, which were approved by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education, and was one of only five four-year public institutions in Missouri to do so.

During the last 108 years that Northwest has served this region and well beyond, the investment in the institution and higher education as a whole continues to be a sound strategy. As we look ahead, Northwest will continue a relentless focus on students, aligning everything we do toward our mission: focusing on student success - every student, every day. We've assembled a Student Success Task Force and are focused on a student success model, addressing programs and services aligned with our three university comprehensive campaign pillars: academic excellence, scholarships and learning environment.

At Northwest we have enhanced our academic performance and programming initiatives while living within our means fiscally and enhancing our financial position. Northwest has shown sustained performance that outpaces our peers on measures such as retention, graduation, satisfaction and engagement, and we're addressing student enhancements such as upgrading our wireless network and dining facilities.

To be sure, we have continuing challenges 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. 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.

*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).*