

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

Saturday marks an exciting day at Northwest Missouri State as we celebrate our annual spring commencement ceremonies and the achievements of 708 graduates – a new record for our university. This group now joins more than 70,000 passionate Northwest alumni and friends who, with you as members of our surrounding communities, are integral to supporting our mission of student success – every student, every day.

Commencement is the culmination of years of hard work, persistence and collaboration exhibited by these graduates as well as by our faculty and staff members who play such a huge role in mentoring and guiding them to attain their goals. Northwest graduates are not the same individuals when they leave the university as when they arrived. They leave the university with a pallet of experiences that have broadened their perspectives and refined their visions for professional success and community impacts.

As I reflect on what we've accomplished at Northwest during this academic year, we also are broadening our perspectives as a university. Northwest is refreshing its services and learning environments across all areas of the institution in a way that enhances student engagement and provides students with the tools they need to be successful.

For example, this spring at Northwest we remodeled a portion of the J.W. Jones Student Union by taking down walls and moving doorways to create a more open, collaborative environment called the Student Engagement Center.

Through the excellent vision and leadership of Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Matt Baker and his team, the space was transformed from a maze of offices to an open environment that embraces Northwest values of student success, intercultural competence and strategic thinking.

Now, student senators and Greek leaders, for example, are no longer working separately within the walls of their respective offices. Instead, the Student Engagement Center provides student groups with increased opportunities to work side-by-side to enhance their programming and better serve their peers.

Within the Student Engagement Center, access to staff in Volunteer Services, Intercultural Affairs or Wellness Services offices are just steps away. Students can more easily make arrangements for an event at the Memorial Bell Tower or secure approval for posters they want to pin throughout campus at the auxiliary services desk. The Student Engagement Center also encompasses the offices of Study Abroad, International Affairs, Campus Activities and Residential Life.

Additionally, students returning to campus next fall will find remodeled dining areas in the Student Union as well as The Station and the B.D. Owens Library. These dining areas also will feature national brands, demonstrating Northwest's continuing emphasis on listening to our students.

The reimagining of that space in the Student Union, however, is just the most recent example of changes taking place across the Northwest campus to ensure the university remains on the cutting edge. Similar transformations have taken place in recent years, for example, in the lower level of Wells Hall, which was remodeled and now houses a state-of-the-art newsroom that places our award-winning student journalists in an environment much like those of their professional peers.

The first floor of the Owens Library was reconfigured into a more open environment with collaborative spaces and new furniture to enhance group work. Last fall, we dedicated the Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families, which houses early childhood classrooms in our Horace Mann Laboratory School and provides enhanced learning environments for children attending the school as well as our practicing university students.

From one end of campus in the Fire Arts Building – where ceramic art students are producing the work you find at popular community events such as Empty Bowls or the recent spring art show and pottery sale – to the other in the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship – where nanoscale science students and intrepid entrepreneurs are conducting research most of us cannot comprehend, Northwest is constantly working to refine and improve its programs and services, which enable students to find their niche.

Students are our focus at Northwest, and as an institution we pride ourselves on being the university of choice for a comprehensive, exceptional student experience. As those students graduating Saturday have changed and evolved during their college careers, so must Northwest as we strive to meet the changing needs of our students, our communities and our world.

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