

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

By the time this is printed, Northwest Missouri State's summer commencement ceremony will be just hours away, and fall classes begin later this month. You can already sense the excitement and promise of a new academic year. This is a fun time of year and, as always, I'm looking forward to what the new academic year has in store for Northwest.

This summer's commencement ceremony highlights the hard work of 248 individuals who have completed undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees or specialist in education degrees. We call the ceremony "a commencement" because we celebrate not only a chapter in these graduates' lives that culminates this week, but it is a beginning, and we know they will accomplish great things in the years ahead.

The next chapter for Northwest graduates begins with obtaining that first job after college, and we know our graduates are successful doing just that. Our latest post-graduate data shows Northwest's placement rate – the percentage of Northwest undergraduates who find employment or continue their education within six months of graduation – has increased to 97.4 percent, from 95 percent the year before. This placement rate is great news and flies in the face of many media reports about higher education's ability to be current and relevant.

The stories I hear and see of our faculty and staff mentoring, challenging and coaching students, keeping them accountable and helping them grow, are awe-inspiring. I truly wish I could capture these stories and share them with those who do not understand and appreciate the transformative nature of higher education. Our faculty and staff – not to mention our entire community – are committed to focusing on student success.

But Northwest's focus on student success doesn't just happen in the classroom. We must also pay close attention to our facilities, and it has been quite interesting to see several enhancements come to life on campus this summer. The J.W. Jones Student Union is undergoing dramatic changes within the Campus Dining area, and this is on top of significant changes already made to our new Student Engagement Center on the second floor of the Student Union.

The food options are going to be tremendous, and we will be serving in the Student Union within a couple weeks. The Station, too, is undergoing change, and the transformation in the B.D. Owens Library continues. Just a hunch, but I think the new Starbucks will be warmly received in the library's new Novel Grounds coffee shop.

Among other projects being completed this summer are roof replacements on Millikan Hall and the Olive DeLuce Fine Arts Building, a remodel of the Fine Arts band room and the construction of an abilities lab for the Department of Health and Human Services.

We continue to receive good news on the gifting front, too. We recently announced Michael Abildtrup, a 1968 Northwest graduate, and his wife, Linda, who attended the University, have committed \$250,000 to assist with improvements at the R.T. Wright Farm. Michael

remains active and connected to Northwest as a member of the Northwest Foundation Board of Directors. We also announced gifts from 1987 alumnus Mitchell Akers as well as Northwest alumni and longtime Maryville residents John and Kris Teale.

In the meantime, Northwest is preparing for its next major philanthropic initiative. This comprehensive campaign is a way for alumni, friends, faculty, staff, parents, corporations and foundations to invest in many of Northwest's strategic priorities and emerging opportunities. The campaign initiatives, which target scholarship support, academic support and student life, aim to enhance academic programs, drive enrollment, relieve budget challenges and address financial pressures associated with an increasingly competitive recruitment market and continued reductions in state funding.

At the Northwest Foundation's Board of Directors meeting last week, the Board was in favor of moving forward with the pre-campaign planning phase suggested by Gonser Gerber, the consulting firm that assisted with the development of the draft case for campaign support and conducted the campaign readiness assessment on Northwest's behalf. The Foundation Board hopes to formally approve the final details of the comprehensive campaign in spring 2014.

In just a couple short weeks, students will be returning – some already have – and our annual Advantage weekend for freshmen and transfer students begins with move-in day, Thursday, Aug. 22. Campus will most definitely come alive that day with some 1,200 new Bearcats and their families. As residents of Maryville and northwest Missouri, let's do our best to provide a warm Bearcat welcome!

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