

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Feb. 6, 2014**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

As February begins, our faculty, staff and students at Northwest Missouri State are settling into the spring term, and we are building on the momentum of a productive fall trimester, capped with an NCAA Division II Football National Championship.

In fact, Northwest supporters locally and throughout the region will have opportunities to see the championship trophy and interact with players and coaches from our Bearcat football team as we launch our Championship Trophy Tour with events in Maryville this weekend. Stop by Maryville's Hy-Vee Saturday morning for photos with the trophy as well as breakfast and autographs.

On Sunday, beginning at 3 p.m. in Bearcat Arena, you'll have another chance to grab autographs along with some photos of this year's Bearcat football jerseys and the championship trophy. The family-friendly event will include an inflatable slide for kids and all attendees can receive a complimentary poster.

From there, the trophy tour will travel to St. Louis, St. Joseph, Omaha and Des Moines and then wrap up in Kansas City, Kan., Feb. 28, at Sporting Park, the new site of the Division II football national championship game.

Additionally, February is Black History Month and we are indeed proud of our diverse culture at Northwest. To commemorate the month, Northwest will host a series of events, including lectures and performances, ranging from poetry to R&B. Our Black History Month celebration culminates with a soul food dinner Feb. 25. For more about Black History events at Northwest, visit our website at www.nwmissouri.edu.

In other news, for the second consecutive year, the university met all five statewide metrics within the state's performance funding model, which consist of retention and graduation rates, quality of learning, financial responsibility and the percent of students receiving institutional grant aid.

Further, our graduates' placement rate of 97.4 percent provides another clear indication of the quality and relevance of the Northwest experience for our students. This is not possible without every one of us pulling together and focusing on student success.

In the meantime, Gov. Jay Nixon's fiscal year 2015 budget recommendations include more than \$120 million of additional investment in higher education and serve as a catalyst for further economic development across the state of Missouri.

With the state realizing the financial benefits of an improving economy, there is no better or more important time to make investments in higher education and future economic development. We at Northwest support the governor's proposal and look forward to working with policymakers at all levels to support his recommendations and continue strengthening Missouri's public higher education system. These strategic investments will help higher education continue serving as a connecting mechanism among K-12 education, the workplace, economic development, community betterment and overall lifelong learning.

While still early in both the state legislative and university budgeting processes, Northwest will use the proposed appropriations increase in performance-based funding to help cover, for example, mandatory expense increases, deferred maintenance and investments in programs and people. Also, a proposed appropriations increase for STEM – science, technology, engineering and math – programs will be used to help fund our top needs in these disciplines, keeping in mind STEM majors account for two of Northwest’s highest-enrolled areas of study.

At Northwest, we have kept tuition increases to the lowest percentage in the nation over the last five years, and it is important to note Northwest leverages student investment in higher education. Not all tuition costs among institutions are apples to apples, as Northwest’s tuition, unlike other institutions, includes a textbook and laptop rental program, saving students an average of \$7,200 over their four years. Additionally, Northwest offers more than 1,200 student employment positions on campus, and 89 percent of our students receive some form of financial assistance.

High octane performance is not possible without all Bearcats – students, faculty, staff, alumni, community – pulling together and focusing on student success. The partnership the University and our communities have must be protected and enhanced. What one does impacts the other, and we live in a synergistic space.

I am hopeful all of us understand that the policies we adopt, the decisions we make and the investment in our own organizations to advance the community impact student recruitment, retention and, ultimately, completion. We live and work together and, accordingly, how we lift each other to help make Northwest and our community a destination of choice is paramount.

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