

**Maryville Daily Forum  
Thursday, May 1, 2014**

**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

We are celebrating again this weekend at Northwest Missouri State University as our spring commencement takes place Saturday. We will recognize 664 new graduates and welcome them as members of our passionate and proud community of alumni and friends, which totals more than 70,000 Bearcats.

Commencement, of course, is a beginning for these graduating students, but it also marks the end of our academic year at Northwest, and it has been a successful one indeed. As the academic year winds down, the month of April is filled with events that celebrate our students and employees, as well as our Northwest legacy – from an unbelievable musical production of “Urinetown,” directed by fine arts faculty Amanda Petefish-Schrag and Dr. Brian Lanier, to our 20th anniversary celebration of the Northwest campus’ designation as the Missouri Arboretum.

To define Northwest’s success during this academic year, the University’s achievements on the national stage are an easy place to start. Our Speaking Bearcats forensics team brought home three individual national titles from the Pi Kappa Delta National Comprehensive Tournament to cap its season in March, thus raising the team’s national championship total to four during the 2013-2014 season alone.

Also, Northwest’s student-led radio station KZLX was named 2013 Pinnacle Station of the Year by the Associated Collegiate Press and College Media Association in the fall. And let’s not forget the Bearcat football program, led by head coach Adam Dorrel, which won its fourth national title in December and received many accolades as a result of that success.

Since the fall of 2009, Northwest teams – across athletic and academic fields – have claimed 14 national titles. That’s a number we’re very proud of at Northwest.

But our success runs deeper than that and it starts in the classroom.

Take for example, Dr. Ben Blackford, assistant professor of management, who recently coordinated Northwest’s third annual New Venture Pitch Competition. The contest gives our students an opportunity to pitch their business ideas to real world investors, in addition to networking with them and hearing their professional insights. The business planning and presentation experience students gain through their participation in the contest is invaluable.

For efforts like this, Dr. Blackford will receive the 2014 Teaching Excellence Award for the Midwestern Council for Business Schools and Programs from ACBSP’s Region 5 in June. “Ben continually incorporates experiential learning activities in the classroom and is engaged in significant research that informs his teaching,” says Dr. Steve Ludwig, who is the chair and assistant professor of Northwest’s Department of Business.

Dr. Rick Toomey, associate professor in the Department of Natural Sciences, is another shining example of how our faculty breeds student success. Toomey employs interactive

tools to engage students in his classroom and ensure they are learning the material. Because of the dedication he shows to students and to his teaching, his student evaluations are nearly perfect.

Last month, Toomey received the 2014 Governor's Award for Excellence in Education during a ceremony at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Toomey was one of 15 university instructors in the state to receive the Governor's Award, which is given annually to outstanding teachers who "challenge and motivate Missouri students to reach their maximum potential."

In the College of Education and Human Services, Dr. Joyce Pivalar has been a champion of preparing future teachers in her more than a decade of service at Northwest, which includes time as a professor, department chair and now as dean and interim provost. She also has been instrumental in developing educational opportunities and partnerships that benefit both Northwest and K-12 students in the Kansas City area.

For her efforts, Dr. Pivalar was recognized recently during the Northland Regional Chamber of Commerce's Annual Excellence in Education Banquet in Kansas City. The banquet honored outstanding students, teachers, staff, volunteers and business supporters of North Kansas City education – a group in which Dr. Pivalar certainly belongs.

At Northwest, we take pride in providing students with opportunities to be successful through hands-on experiences and collaborative activities. As part of that goal, our faculty and staff focuses daily on their roles within Northwest's student success model. How they do this benefits enrollment, retention, graduation and Northwest's 97.4 percent undergraduate and 99 percent graduate placement rates.

As members of this community, you play an important role in Northwest's success, too. To each of you, we say thank you. Thanks for supporting our students with your partnerships, mentorships, leadership and friendships. Thanks for helping our students to make Northwest and Maryville their home away from home. Thanks for helping 2013-2014 turn into another successful academic year at Northwest Missouri State!

*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).*