

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Sept. 4, 2014**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Our students are moved in and we are near the end of our second full week of classes at Northwest Missouri State. The campus grounds look awesome, and it is good to see not just the University but the city buzzing again, too, as our students' presence brings a vitality to our community.

Things are converging for Northwest in a beautiful way, and our newly developed strategic plan will guide us in a unified direction. Our preliminary enrollment figures show Northwest's student headcount is up 3.5 percent this fall with 6,573 students enrolled on our first day of classes. That total includes 1,333 first-time freshmen, which was a 2.9 percent increase from the first day of classes last fall.

Additionally, we're seeing a substantial increase in our international enrollment, which doubled from last year and now stands at 717 students representing 32 countries. And Northwest's graduate school enrollment is 1,165, which is up 30.8 percent from the same time last year.

Each fall brings new initiatives to campus and a sense of renewal, but our increased enrollment is a testament to the comprehensive educational experience Northwest provides and our commitment to the direction gleaned from our strategic planning activities as well as our faculty and staff who commit themselves daily to student success. Our admissions team is tremendous in their efforts to attract students, but as we often say to our students and employees – all of us must be active recruiters for Northwest and our community.

But as our enrollment grows and our campus community becomes more diverse, it is increasingly important for the success of our students and our campus climate to engage in a campus-wide – and community-wide – dialogue about race and overall diversity and inclusion. The recent events in Ferguson can and should influence a larger discussion, and we must challenge ourselves to engage in what can be uncomfortable conversations. We must analyze how we are working to understand racial and other inequities, and work to be part of the solution.

We know the U.S. Census Bureau forecasts college-bound students in the next 20 years to be increasingly diverse. The more our students learn about diversity, the more prepared and successful they will be in their communities and workplaces. Intercultural competence, respect and integrity are part of our University values, and we must discuss, act upon and uphold these values.

Our call is simple, yet exceedingly difficult: engage in conversations with each other and our students about race and social justice. Let's challenge ourselves to make a difference. Help be part of enhanced understanding and respect as well as meaningful change.

With the calendar turned to September and the academic year in full swing, there are several ways for you to be part of what's happening at Northwest and, in the process,

perhaps gain some new perspectives about the world in which we live and work through our various lecture, performance and professional development series.

Our defending national champion football team kicks off its season at 7 p.m. today against Nebraska-Kearney at Bearcat Stadium. As you are invited to do prior to every home football game, join us at 5 p.m. at College Park on the Northwest campus for the Hy-Vee Bearcat Zone. The tailgate party and pep rally features performances by the Bearcat Marching Band, Northwest cheerleaders and the Bearcat steppers. For more information about all of our athletics teams and their upcoming games, visit www.bearcatsports.com.

On Tuesday, Sept. 9, we will gather to celebrate our 2014 Faculty Dean's Award recipients and announce Northwest's recipient of the 2015 Governor's Award for Excellence. These awards annually recognize select faculty for their outstanding achievements in the areas of teaching, service and scholarship. Also, at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 10, join us at our new Support Services Building on the northwest side of the campus as we cut the ribbon and officially celebrate the opening of the facility, which houses the University Police Department and the Office of Purchasing. The celebration will feature a parade of purchasing and police staff as well as other state and city emergency vehicles.

It is a great feeling to begin a new academic year. The landscape of higher education is changing, but Northwest has set the stage and our faculty, staff and students are prepared to face the challenges head on. I encourage you, as members of the Northwest community, to be engaged and build connections.

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