

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

Northwest Missouri State students returned from spring break this week and our University community is geared up for all that comes with putting a cap on the academic year. At the same time, our plans and progress continue to play out in a variety of areas in terms of recruitment, strengthened academic programs and helping students secure job or graduate school placements.

Northwest offers so many examples of departments engaging in efforts to set themselves apart and provide opportunities that prepare students for success after they leave Northwest. With an eye on retention and helping first-year students be successful, we recently announced plans to pilot major-related academic living communities in our residence halls, starting with students in agricultural sciences and natural sciences majors.

One of the ways we prepare students for success was illustrated recently by our didactic program in dietetics, which hosted and received high marks from a three-member team representing the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics. The team commended instructors Karen From and Kelli Wilmes for their commitment to ensuring the program is a quality experience for students. Our students also offered high praise for faculty, saying they provide a high level of rigor while supporting them on a path toward achieving and modeling our mission of focusing on student success.

The visiting team indicated faculty throughout Northwest have high expectations to achieve, and that influences students in other programs. The team members also noted the amount of community involvement and volunteerism dietetics students put forth and how those experiences have contributed to their growth and maturity in the program.

That is just one example, and the high expectations our faculty set forth at Northwest extend far beyond the classroom.

Director of Forensics Brian Swafford and our Speaking Bearcats forensics team recently placed fifth at the Pi Kappa Delta Biennial Convention and Tournament and three students – Hugh Slaton, Tom Pinney and Gabbi Ray – claimed individual national championships, giving Northwest 18 national championships since 2009 across academics and athletics.

Our Tower Choir, under the direction of Dr. Stephen Town, spent its spring break week on a nine-day tour that allowed them to share their special music and vocal talents at schools, churches and other venues in Missouri, Alabama and Tennessee.

Also, students in Northwest's Alternative Spring Break organization, under the advisement of Assistant Director of Campus Activities Amy Nally, took part in a service-learning trip to Puerto Rico to work on environmental and eco restorations projects. Another group headed to New Orleans to participate in rebuilding projects and community-based programs.

Others are noticing Northwest's efforts, too. In addition to meetings with lawmakers during my recent travels to Washington, D.C., I attended a quarterly meeting last month of The

Hawthorn Foundation's Board of Directors, which is comprised of 50-plus statewide leaders across various sectors. Northwest was featured prominently throughout the meeting.

The Hawthorn Foundation was founded in 1982 by then-Gov. Kit Bond and is a highly diverse group of Missouri leaders in business, education, economic development, healthcare and labor dedicated to the development of a vibrant economy for the state of Missouri. Northwest recently received two grants from USA Funds, of which the Hawthorne Foundation is the fiscal agent.

Dr. Mike Nietzel, representing the governor's office, touted Northwest, calling it "the big winner in the \$2 million grant funding competition." The university also was praised by several business leaders along with State Economic Development Director Mike Downing and the Honorable Kit Bond.

During a luncheon, with more than 100 state business leaders, political appointees and others present, I again was asked to address our grants and describe what is happening at Northwest. Gov. Nixon spoke and touted Northwest's efforts as well.

A significant number of individuals wanted to learn more about what we are doing at Northwest. It is hard to explain in this space, but suffice it to say that the university showed quite well and we have piqued a fair bit of interest. We have a bright road ahead on a number of projects.

It is all these things – engaged learning communities, collaboration and networking with industry leaders, and providing students with a high level of rigor while offering support – that translate into student success, graduate school and job placements, and enriched and meaningful lives and communities.

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