

**Maryville Daily Forum**  
**Thursday, Sept. 3, 2015**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

After months of planning and continued progress, we are embarking on another academic year at Northwest Missouri State – this being our 111th year of serving our region and beyond.

Classes began Monday after an outstanding Advantage Week, during which we welcomed a near-record freshman class of 1,478 – an increase of 11 percent from last fall. Our annual Advantage Week offers opportunities for new students to meet people and learn more about campus and college life while hearing from powerful speakers and enjoying some fun entertainment as they get settled into their new environment.

The growth of our freshman class is exceptional and helps offset the largest graduating class in Northwest's history this past spring – and huge numbers last December as well. Our enrollment team and so many partners across the institution have taken intentional and strategic steps to ensure this growth.

Monday's first day of classes also coincided with the opening of our Robert and Virginia Foster Fitness Center, a sparkling new facility with 19,490 square feet of open floor space, state-of-the-art cardio and weight-lifting machines, a human performance lab and classroom space. Join us and take a peek at the fitness center as we host a grand-opening ceremony at 10:30 a.m. Sept. 10.

Tuesday, we celebrated the opening of our School of Health Science and Wellness. The new School is the result of numerous discussions internally and with regional partners. We are building on a solid foundation of established programs in pre-professional health and wellness at Northwest, and the new School further enhances those programs while meeting the needs of students, our region and the new, emerging national health care system.

The opening of the Foster Fitness Center and the School of Health Science and Wellness are more outcomes of our ongoing strategic planning, which is entering a new cycle as we work toward fulfilling strategic objectives. During the 2014-2015 academic year, we refined and prioritized strategic actions tied to four strategic objectives and developed a set of University Goals. A great deal of energy and work was devoted to these actions.

Our strategic plan is action-oriented and is used for decision-making and focusing our work. Northwest is resilient and has a history of adapting to the changing environment, and we are in a hyper-change mode across the educational spectrum. Northwest's performance continues to be strong – yet we must continue to evolve and strengthen our position – and that's why we are disrupting from a position of strength. By working together to execute our strategic plan, we will grow enrollment, elevate our academic programs and culture, increase student success, and ensure the longer-term viability and vitality of Northwest.

Our opening meetings for faculty and staff last week were punctuated by Dr. Joe Martin's motivating address at our all-employee meeting. Dr. Martin talked from the heart and impressed upon us that all of us matter, no matter our job title. All of us have a role in

helping students succeed and feel part of our community. All of them have stories to share. We need to listen. Connect.

Our faculty meeting afterward also produced powerful testimonials by alumni about the impacts of their faculty mentors. Congratulations to Dr. Loren Butler, associate professor of health and physical education; Doni Mollus, senior instructor of business; Dr. Theo Ross, professor of fine arts; Dr. Patti Drews, professor of geography; and Daniel Smith, assistant professor of political science – all of whom were honored as “high impact” faculty.

And our Welcome Back Picnic – as I told Mrs. J walking home – was the most moving and powerful picnic I have ever attended. I heard a staff member talk about a student who recently went on a mission trip and brought back to her a gift – signifying how that staff member was an angel for this student. A new staff member discussed how attitude and can-do spirit is a noticeable strength of ours, and yet it seemed to expand even more during the day.

Our spirit and heart are key to our leadership. We all help students succeed – every student, every day. Each student has his or her own story. Northwest, with our regional partners, is steadfast in its role of providing profession-based experiences, bettering lives, powering dreams and uplifting communities. Thank you, community partners, for your role in connecting with, uplifting and helping students succeed.

*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).*