

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

The word opportunity has a myriad of meanings. Northwest provides opportunities to transform lives in Maryville, St. Joseph and Kansas City. We provide opportunities to strengthen families, communities economic development and the organizations for which our graduates work. We provide opportunities for Bearcats of all kinds to connect – in so many ways.

Amid racial tensions at the University of Missouri-Columbia and other campuses throughout the country, I believe we are in the middle of history-making events where we each have a chance to shape how they will be recorded and remembered in the years ahead. We have an opportunity, and we are going to seize the opportunity to make a difference.

Significant events have occurred in the last month, and our campus was not immune. I am thankful for our University Police Department and for faculty and staff who are addressing these teachable moments.

As a university we have made some progress on diversity and inclusion, but our understanding of, empathy for and action toward diversity, inclusion and equity has not yielded enough meaningful movement toward an ideal state at Northwest Missouri State University.

Last month's open forum at Northwest to discuss social justice was a shining example of providing opportunity. Our student planning team, in my opinion, served as national role models. Our students told us, "We want to do something. Something meaningful, impactful." We supported the opportunity for open dialogue and all those involved provided an opportunity to embrace unity through courageous conversation, civil discourse, openness and respect.

It's noteworthy in all of this that Northwest has a strategic plan, titled FOCUS, that guides and prioritizes how we move forward as a university. During the summer, we added a new objective to our plan, known as Strategic Objective 3, focused exclusively on enhancing diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

We have a set of strategic goals and associated performance goals and metrics. Our data sets show we have gaps to address. Our strategy is driving actions that include reworking our general education program to include a "Global Experiences" component, training employees on leadership competencies, and enhancing our multicultural infrastructure and programming.

Our student planning team met with our employee team members representing Strategic Objective 3 and worked through an after action review of the open forum on the morning after the open forum. We shared robust discussions at a Leadership Roundtable, too.

We have added students to the strategic objective action team and have generated a listing of potential actions and a process to address such. To name a few actions, we are looking at creating meaningful and mandatory student and employee training, enhancing Human

Resources practices and support for diverse employees, and infusing social justice in our curriculum. We will encourage participation in meaningful dialogues and be comfortable being uncomfortable.

Our Faculty Senate also recently passed an enhancement to the general education curriculum, now referred to as the Northwest Core. Still needing Board of Regents approval, the Northwest Core will link core learning – foundations, contexts and connections – to co-curricular experiences.

I am challenging myself to be the champion for diversity, equity and inclusion, and want to ensure it remains action-oriented and visible across the university. But we also must involve our community. City and broader community leaders should be part of – and rooted within – our ongoing actions related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

We can inject change, and every single one of us has a critical role in doing so. Everyone can and should be a leader in this effort to enhance our cultural awareness, engagement and connectedness.

As Dr. Joe Martin challenged our employees at Northwest's August All-Employee Meeting, we all have a story to share and we must listen to each other's stories. We all deserve equality. We all are part of the solution.

The holiday season has arrived, and Winter Commencement is upon us Dec. 18, during which we will celebrate the achievements of about 600 Northwest students who are joining the ranks of our 70,000-plus alumni.

Tonight, I hope you will join us at the Thomas Gaunt House on the Northwest campus for the annual Holiday Tree Lighting. We'll begin at 5:15 p.m. and have refreshments. You can even get your picture with Santa Bobby Bearcat.

Enjoy this holiday season. Thank you for providing opportunity and light in our community.

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