

**Maryville Daily Forum
Thursday, Aug. 4, 2016**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Our Northwest Missouri State University community was faced again this week with the difficult task of coping with the loss of a student. Tonight, we'll gather in the Centennial Garden on campus to celebrate the life of Jae Won Lee, a 16-year-old first-year student attending our Missouri Academy of Science, Mathematics and Computing, who died after a drowning accident Monday night.

With the family and our community, we will mourn, yet we will press on. The start of another academic year is upon us, and activity on campus is picking up. Student leaders and student-athletes are arriving now and traffic on Main Street is picking up. Our first-year students begin arriving as soon as Aug. 25 for our annual Advantage Week, and the campus will be buzzing again when we begin classes Aug. 29. Economic and tourism activity will increase, and we embrace the cultural vibrancy our students bring.

We continue to be bold with our planning and actions that help Northwest and be mission-driven. As such we are pleased to announce this week that Dr. Juanita Simmons will join our team as our first vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Dr. Simmons is the right leader at the right time, and we welcome her to our learning community. Her life and academic experiences are rich, real and perfectly suited to help us bolster our efforts in terms of access and success, teaching and learning, and campus and community climate.

For the last 13 years, Dr. Simmons has served the University of Missouri-Columbia as a faculty member, teaching educational leadership and policy analysis in its College of Education. Her professional career also includes service in a variety of administrative roles in the Austin and Dallas, Texas, independent school districts. Her research and honors are extensive.

As you may recall, our path to this point is more than a year in the making. Northwest's Extended Leadership Team voted last August to elevate diversity, equity and inclusion as a single strategic objective within our strategic planning process. As a result, we created a Strategic Objective 3 team consisting of a cross-functional group of faculty, staff and students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The team analyzed our past efforts, research, infrastructure and programming to uncover the strengths and weaknesses facing Northwest.

Throughout the 2015-16 academic year, many inputs were gathered and shared – which led to the development of a new structure within our Office of Multicultural Student Success and a proposal that our Board of Regents approved in April to add a vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion. This is the first step toward building infrastructure that supports all people within the Northwest community, that supports students and employees from marginalized backgrounds, and provides institutional support to offices and individuals on campus.

Our Board of Regents, faculty and staff, community and business leaders have been very supportive of our elevating the University's strategic focus on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. This is a historic moment in time and we all realize that our work will not rest on the shoulders of one leader or one division, but rather we all will play a key role in actualizing intercultural competence, civility and unity for the ages.

This week, we also welcome our Northwest Foundation Board of Directors to campus for its fall meeting. Our Foundation Board consists of 33 members, including seven new members, who come from throughout the country and represent a variety of fields. They also are passionate about supporting Northwest and ensuring our progress well into the future.

Furthermore, we are counting the days to Aug. 18, when we celebrate the grand opening of our new Northwest-Kansas City location at the Northland Innovation Campus in Gladstone. This, too, has been years in the making and a significant point of pride since establishing our partnership with the city of Gladstone and North Kansas City Schools and breaking ground on the new facility in May 2015.

Northwest has offered graduate coursework in the Kansas City area for decades. The opening of the Northland Innovation Campus allows us to broaden our reach to assist Kansas City-based students through our bachelor's degree completion programs in business management, marketing, elementary education and special education.

As we enter the 2016-17 academic year, we ask for your continued support as we prepare our graduates to be future-focused and meet the challenges of an ever-changing world.

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