

Local newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

We are nearing the halfway point of our 2018-19 academic year, and there is a great deal of goodness happening at Northwest Missouri State University that we see every day.

Our fall enrollment increased 8.2 percent to a total headcount of 6,857 students, and we broke an all-time institutional record with our first-time, full-time freshman fall-to-fall retention rate at 78 percent. In fact, our fall-to-fall retention rate broke an all-time University record, shattering the 73.5 percent mark set in fall 2007.

These numbers are tied to each and every one of us on the Northwest campus and in our communities and the work we do every day to help our region prosper and students succeed. As I often tell our employees at Northwest – everyone is a recruiter!

Our enrollment at Northwest also complements a suite of performance results that are quite impressive and hard to replicate. Our latest Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory results indicate, on all scales and items, Northwest obtained higher satisfaction rates than national and regional comparison groups.

Northwest had 73.6 percent of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile on our most recent general education assessment, breaking our all-time mark for the second consecutive year, and Northwest is nearly 14 percent above the state-established benchmark.

We are the state leader across all institutions in career placement, which represents the percentage of degree earners who secure employment or continue their education within six months of graduating, and we improved again in the last cycle to 96.6 percent for undergraduates and 99.3 percent for graduates.

Of course, Northwest prides itself on affordability as we provide textbooks and laptops to all students, saving them more than \$7,300 over four years, and we offer 96 percent of our first-time, full-time students some type of financial aid. We are ranked fourth-lowest among 17 comparative universities in net price and cost of attendance. Also, our change in net tuition and fees compared to the Missouri household income was 1.2 percent versus 3.3 percent, respectively, from 2014 to 2016, and tuition increases, statewide and institutionally, were the lowest in the nation during the last nine years.

Our most recent student loan default rate decreased to 7.9 percent, while the federal default rate for the same cycle is 10.8 percent.

We generated \$76 million in savings between 2012 and 2018 through cost containment and efficiency initiatives. Further, Moody's Investors Service provided us in August with a strong credit rating confirming our 2015 rating of "A3 - Stable Outlook" while the higher education industry received a "negative outlook" rating this last year. Our recent Higher Learning Commission visit also yielded strong accolades, and we anticipate a strong post-visit report in the coming months.

In addition to the grand-opening of our Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse on Oct. 12 and reflecting on the superlatives gained to make that project a reality, it is notable that we secured our first-ever endowed professorship gift, thanks to Dennis C. Dau, during our Forever Green comprehensive campaign, and bestowed that professorship on Dr. William Richardson, a professor of music and the assistant chair of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts.

And the accolades keep coming. On Oct. 28, we received the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' (AASCU) 2018 Christa McAuliffe Excellence in Teacher Education Award – our third national award from AASCU in the last four years. While the McAuliffe Award celebrates our School of Education, performance excellence and profession-based learning opportunities are all around us – with the annual Missouri Hope Disaster Response Field Training Exercise and our annual Freshman/Transfer theater showcase – to name a couple more.

In alignment with our core competencies of being safe, trusted, invested and resourceful – we call it STIR – Northwest is guided by five strategic objectives. They guide our thinking, our actions and our investments. Our priorities for the academic year continue the work we have been doing, with a focus on recruitment and retention.

We are continuing our focus on new academic programming and delivery methods, intensifying our focus on profession-based learning and uplifting students by meeting their needs. In doing so, we celebrate the wealth of talent and commitment from an incredible faculty and staff and help contribute to the economic vitality of our region. The \$617.5 million we provide in added regional income is but one indicator of Northwest being a steward of place. We are proud to be part of this community and region.

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