

Local newspaper column
Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019
Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

We began the second half of our 2018-19 academic year this week at Northwest Missouri State and it is such a joy to welcome employees and students back to the campus and our community. In the meantime, the celebrations keep coming and these recent weeks have been all about our employees.

During our Jan. 9 All-Employee Meeting, we recognized the work of our employees and their dedication to Northwest's success each and every day. More specifically, we celebrated the work of faculty and staff members and teams who were nominated by their peers to be recognized with this year's Northwest Excellence Awards. Before our winter break, we also celebrated employees who have reached milestones in their years of employment at Northwest. They included Professor of Theatre Dr. Theo Ross for 40 years at Northwest, Director of Purchasing Ann Martin and Professor of Psychology Dr. Jerrold Barnett for 35 years, and Cheryl Birkenholz, a help desk specialist in the Office of Information Technology, and Dr. Carol Spradling, the director of our School of Computer Science and Information Systems, for 30 years of service.

As we turn the page to 2019, we are reviewing progress on the university's five strategic objectives, our accomplishments during the fall semester and how we are responding to the disruption that is impacting higher education and our environment at Northwest.

Our performance excellence during the fall months was abundant. You will recall that Moody's gave Northwest a positive A3 Stable rating that reaffirmed the financial outlook presented to us in 2015 – while the overall credit outlook on the higher education sector is negative and various institutions have been placed on the financial watchlist. You know our fall enrollment increased 8.2 percent and we broke an all-time institutional record with a fall-to-fall retention rate of 78 percent. From sustainability to career placement to affordability, fundraising, accreditations and satisfaction, the list goes on.

But we also have opportunities – areas where we know we have a chance to move ahead of the curve and up our game – specifically in technology and organizational design. Applications for enrollment are up, but we know our demographics are changing and we must be agile, adaptive and focused. We are exploring alternative pathways and diversification as we analyze our market segments.

When I meet with leaders at our peer institutions and state legislators, they know we perform, and our Northwest excellence will fuel legislative discussions in coming months as we make our appeal for state appropriations. Northwest will achieve three of three measures for funding performance and likely four of six overall. The Missouri Department of Higher Education has requested \$26.7 million for all institutions with up to 3 percent of institutional FY 2019 core budgets – 1 percent for each successful performance measure – requested as new monies in FY 2020.

Additionally, we are excited to have accepted an invitation from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' (AASCU) Center for Student Success to join just five other

member institutions and work together during the next 15 months and validate a set of strategies as AASCU launches a new Center for Student Success. The project is funded through a \$1 million Gates Foundation Prep for Scale grant. Like Northwest, AASCU recognizes the need to increase graduation rates and narrow achievement gaps, and we are eager to help AASCU support new and innovative approaches to improving student success.

Finally, I encourage you to stay tuned to our website, social media or the pages of this newspaper for upcoming events on our campus and ways you can be part of what's happening on the Northwest campus. Mooyah Burgers, a new dining location on campus in The Station, is already generating a lot of excitement, and we invite you to visit it for a burger and shake. In addition, next week's Martin Luther King Celebration Week includes several activities and presentations, beginning with our day of service and annual peace brunch at 11 a.m. Monday in the Student Union Ballroom. The week also includes a Wednesday night screening of "King in the Wilderness" and a Thursday night performance by Martin Luther King Jr. reenactor Stephon Ferguson.

We know we have a special culture at Northwest, and our surrounding communities are such a big part of it. We thank you for supporting Bearcats and our focus on student success. Help us protect our culture and have a great 2019!

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