

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Oct. 17, 2019**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

The leaves on the trees are changing colors, highlighting one piece of what makes the Northwest Missouri State University campus a jewel of our region. At the same time, our 2019-20 academic year has begun with a number of high notes that further illustrate our performance excellence.

We are proud that, this month, for the fourth time in five years, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) will honor Northwest with an Excellence and Innovation Award by presenting us with its award for Student Success and College Completion. The award recognizes our significant work to implement a reimagined student success strategy and, in the process, elevate our recruitment and completion initiatives.

Further validating our focus on student success, AASCU recently extended its partnership with Northwest and four other universities on a collaborative effort to share tools and expertise with the goal of scaling student support services to the broader AASCU membership. The project, begun last January, has been fruitful and recently yielded opportunities for our campus community to provide feedback about key barriers affecting student success while suggesting opportunities for us to better serve underrepresented and Pell-eligible students, and highlight programs and services critical to student success.

As with all awards, the credit goes to so many for such incredible work in the name of student success. This is truly an institutional effort. Our efforts in implementing an integrated model cut across teams and individuals, and we are thankful for our institutional ethos focused on student success. We continue to build, adapt and refine our approaches to address changing learners' needs through partnerships, the great work of our faculty and staff and other stakeholders.

Everyone plays a role in student success at Northwest. To provide just one example, a staff member coming to work on a recent morning in the B.D. Owens Library noticed some writing on a whiteboard table in our Student Success Center. A student had written on the table about some difficulty she was having, and a night custodian responded with words of encouragement, telling the student to "Hang in there!" and "Stay strong!" The custodian had established a connection with the student, which led to the staff member reaching out to the student and helping her stay on track. We hear so many stories like this, illustrating the ways people from areas across our campus help our students succeed.

Our strong enrollment numbers add to the story. This fall, 7,104 students enrolled at Northwest, setting the third-highest headcount in our institution's history and our fourth time above the 7,000 mark. That enrollment number represents a 3.6-percent increase from last fall and an increase of nearly 11 percent during the last two years – at a time when many of our peers are recording decreased enrollments.

Further, our retention rate – the number of freshmen who return for their sophomore year – stands at 76 percent this fall, second only to the record retention rate of 78 percent we set a year ago. Our placement rates remain high with 97 percent of bachelor's degree earners

and 99 percent of master's degree earners securing employment or continuing their education within six months of graduation. These numbers are illustrative of Northwest's place as a leader in providing high-quality education at a great value and affordable cost.

As I started this column with an acknowledgement of the changing season, the fall colors also remind us that Northwest's annual Homecoming activities are quickly approaching. Next week's celebration, with the theme of "Bearcats Ever After," includes the Variety Show on Thursday night, the International Flag Raising Ceremony and M-Club Hall of Fame induction ceremony on Friday, and our Homecoming parade and football game on Saturday. Be sure, also, to watch our reigning NCAA Division II national champion men's basketball team against Duke University at 6 p.m. Saturday on ACC Network Extra via the ESPN app.

Additionally, we hope you will join us at 3:30 p.m. Thursday at the Memorial Bell Tower as we kick off our "Forever Green" campaign for Northwest. As I've mentioned previously in this space, we are so proud to be entering the public phase of this capital campaign, which seeks to raise \$45 million for initiatives and projects that support Northwest's strengths, establish innovative academic programming, intensify our emphasis on profession-based learning and provide solutions for our students, communities and workforce. The campaign is the second in our institution's storied history, and we are so thankful for those who have supported us to date and will do so in the future.

As residents of our region, you are a valued partner – and key contributors – in the continued success of Northwest and our students. We hope you will join us next week as we celebrate all things Northwest!

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