

**Local newspaper column  
Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019**

**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

Every day is a great day to be a Bearcat, but these December days are especially wonderful as we reflect on all we have accomplished during the last year and celebrate the achievements of the 657 students who received their degrees, joining the ranks of Northwest Missouri State University alumni during commencement ceremonies last week.

All told, 402 students received bachelor's degrees, 253 received master's degrees and two received education specialist degrees. The most common graduate degrees were applied computer science and education leadership for K-12, and our top undergraduate major was elementary education.

Fifty-three percent of our graduates came from Missouri, while another 24 percent were natives of Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska. They came from all parts of the nation – with graduates from California, Texas, Florida and New York represented – and the world, with 101 international graduates representing China, India, Japan, South Korea, Nepal, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. They also were diverse in age, with members of our winter graduating class ranging from 20 years old to 55.

Indeed, our latest graduates – like the Bearcats who came before them – left their marks on Northwest in countless ways. They engaged and contributed to our communities. They persevered through challenges. They connected.

And we didn't just celebrate our graduates this month. On Tuesday, we recognized 109 employees who reached milestone years of service at Northwest this year – including Kim Hullinger, an education compliance specialist in our professional education and assessment unit, who has been employed at Northwest for 40 years.

Here's a sampling of other Northwest employees and teams and recent achievements as we close out 2019:

Cindy Rouner, the director of our Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families, and her team led the way to the Leet Center's outdoor classroom receiving recognition as a Certified Nature Explore Classroom. We are so proud of the myriad experiences our School of Education provides students, and the outdoor classroom is a key component of that learning environment.

Brian Swink, an instructor of mathematics and statistics, received the Missouri Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Outstanding Mathematics Educator Award for post-secondary educators. Brian is another excellent example of a Northwest faculty member who forms strong connections with students to ensure their success.

Paula McLain, our student employment coordinator, received the President's Award from the National Student Employment Association. We are so grateful for Paula's leadership of our student employment program, which is a model that other institutions continuously look to replicate.

We are proud of our Bearcat athletics teams and all the good they represent at Northwest and in our communities, too. The Bearcat men's cross country team finished fifth – its best in program history – at the NCAA Division II national meet. Bearcat volleyball earned its first conference tournament win since 1992. And our Bearcat football team reached the NCAA Division II playoffs for the 16th consecutive year and advanced to the quarterfinal round.

We have so many faculty and staff who volunteer their time and serve a variety of organizations throughout our communities and the state. Registrar Terri Vogel recently was elected president-elect of the Missouri Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, and Jacque Loghry, assistant director of our TRIO Student Support Services, was named parliamentarian for the regional chapter of the Educational Opportunity Association. We are thankful for Terri and Jacque – and all others – who give of their time to advance their fields and serve as ambassadors for Northwest.

The Gladys M. Rickard Charitable Trust recently provided a \$10,000 grant to support Northwest's Pay It Forward Fund, which assists students in need. We are thankful for Pay It Forward Committee members Dr. Justin Mallett, Sue Nickerson, Jackie Runde, Jody Throener and Ameer Wilmes for their commitment to developing and maintaining this important resource for students in need.

Finally, thank you to all who attended our Holiday Tree Lighting Dec. 3 at Northwest's Memorial Bell Tower. Mrs. J and I annually invite you to give to select causes to assist our communities, and donation bins will remain in the Administration Building, B.D. Owens Library, Lamkin Activity Center and the Student Union through Friday, Dec. 20. Please consider giving to the Career Closet, Bearcat Food Pantry, Pay It Forward Fund, Ben's Stockings of Hope or We Gotchya.

As we reflect on 2019 and all we accomplished, thank you for your partnership and continuing to advance Northwest! Have a joyous holiday season!

*Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest visit [www.nwmissouri.edu](http://www.nwmissouri.edu).*