

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, April 16, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

I hope today's message finds you well and making the best of our current situation as all of us continue to navigate these uncharted times. At Northwest Missouri State, we are working every day to ensure learning continues, maintain connections, show pride for our University and the communities we serve, and – especially during this time of uncertainty – practice care and civility.

In recent weeks we learned of our first local cases of coronavirus in Nodaway County, including one case affecting a Northwest employee. We have announced that all of our courses are online through the summer, and our rescheduled spring commencement is Saturday, Aug. 8. For our employees, we have invoked a plan to address work modes and coverage of accrued time through April 30.

Learning is taking place online. Faculty are coaching and mentoring. Most co-curricular activities are online and focused on engagement. The fluidity with which our faculty have moved online and the connections they are maintaining have been tremendous. As we read about the difficulties other universities have had going online, Northwest faculty, at every turn, have been there, anticipated issues and addressed them with efficiency.

Our staff, while working remotely, has gone above and beyond to keep Northwest's operations running. Our custodial team continues to provide exceptional cleaning services across the campus to protect the health and safety of our community.

We know there have been hiccups along the way, but as Bearcats we are persevering. We are making incremental decisions with health and safety in mind and maintaining a tolerance for ambiguity through all of this. We must try to understand the complexities and challenges of our situation – and be part of the solution.

On a broader scope, the mantra around the country when so many of us talk about the future and impacts of COVID-19 is "we simply don't know." We don't know what realities we may need to confront in the coming months. With that in mind, Northwest is working diligently to protect student success and our people through the COVID-19 pandemic and through the end of this fiscal year. As we think through the future, including the next fiscal year and beyond, we have to understand it will be difficult and not business as it was even six months ago. Hopefully, as April passes, we'll gain a little clarity relative to summer and fall enrollment trends, FY20 and FY21 state budget decisions and, especially, the COVID-19 spread trends.

We acknowledge anxiety is high, and some of it cannot and will not be reduced. Northwest is being upfront about what we can control and what we cannot – and how we can have a growth mindset and still face some sobering possibilities.

With the federal government's passing of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Northwest expects to recover about \$4.8 million through that stimulus package. About half of that will be directed to students in the form of grants and emergency

aid, and we are awaiting more exact guidance on how we may use the rest of the monies. Further, Northwest is a member of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities – one of the big six higher education associations in Washington, D.C., which are collaborating and working with congressional staff on a fourth supplemental appropriations bill to assist the higher education sector.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a severe strain on the state budget – with delayed tax filing deadlines, rapidly declining sales and incomes taxes, and increased spending on efforts related to the pandemic response all playing a role. Northwest will see a state appropriations withhold of about \$2.5 million for the last part of FY20. We understand these are unprecedented times and recognize all sectors have to do their part to help the governor realize a balanced budget. Higher education certainly is one of the state's key sectors and we all must step up to assist the state in these difficult times.

I urge all of us to do our part and take all necessary precautions as we adapt to this new reality. At the same time, as I've asked my colleagues to do, it is important that we check in with each other, find ways to uplift one another and take care of ourselves. Let us keep those who have lost their lives, who are sick, who are service providers, and all who are deeply impacted by this situation in our thoughts.

Be well – and stay connected.

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