

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, May 21, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

Northwest Missouri State's spring semester ended May 8 – though it certainly wasn't the end any of us expected. Still it is worth reflecting on all we accomplished, not just in recent months but throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. From opening last fall with the third-highest enrollment in our institution's history – including 46 percent our freshman class identifying as first-generation students – to our continued collaboration with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities on student success strategies. From the yeoman's work our employees put forth to maintain our mission and focus on student success during a global pandemic to launching our Forever Green campaign and providing a virtual groundbreaking for the Agricultural Learning Center just last month. From our continued focus on our people to being named the safest college in the state of Missouri.

This has been a monumental year in Northwest Missouri State's history, and I thank our surrounding communities for all they do to support us.

Yet, we have a tough road ahead as we continue navigating the effects of COVID-19. As we transitioned courses to online formats this spring – and kept an eye on strengthening Northwest for the future – our faculty and staff made it a priority to remove barriers that hindered student success. Allow me to share just a few of the numerous examples of policy changes and fixes we implemented in recent months.

- With COVID-19 leading to the cancelation of standardized testing for high school students, we implemented a pilot for test-optional admissions for fall 2020, spring 2021 and beyond, if needed. Through this pilot, which the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development will assess throughout FY21, we will grant admission if students meet high school core requirements and have a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.0. Although, specific groups must submit ACT and SAT scores for admission, including athletes, home-schooled students, unaccredited high school graduates and others needing admission-based scholarships.
- To assist high school graduates and transfer students seeking admission to Northwest, we are accepting pass/fail grades for courses completed during spring and summer 2020.
- Our Bearcats Helping Bearcats campaign, launched in March to support the Pay it Forward Fund and the Bearcat Food Pantry, is providing funds to Northwest students who are struggling financially, while engaging them with resources they need to be successful financially, socially and academically. To date, 90 alumni and friends have provided more than \$19,000 for the immediate support of students. Given growing student need, we encourage continued giving to this endeavor.
- In Wellness Services, we implemented telemedicine and telecounseling visits, with support from multiple states, to provide virtual counseling to our out-of-state students.

As Northwest looks ahead, we know some of our peers reopened last week, even as cities like Kansas City and Omaha are popping up as hotspots. Our University, in the meantime, has adopted a phased recovery strategy that prioritizes the health and safety of our students, employees and visitors. We know we must be flexible and adaptable, but our goal is to stay open and operational, even as conditions change rapidly. We will remain attuned to local and regional conditions, and these will help inform and shape our actions. We are looking toward and squarely focusing on a strategy for beginning the fall semester as scheduled on Aug. 19.

We have developed a phased recovery schedule that addresses how and when University operations will transition back to campus. We launched Phase I: Restricted Operations on Monday by allowing a limited number of employees to return to work on campus.

On Monday, June 8, we anticipate transitioning to Phase II: Limited Operations, which includes keeping facilities closed to the public initially and then opening to the public Monday, June 22. By Thursday, July 15, we hope to enter Phase III, which called for a return to full operations with COVID-19 mitigation measures in place.

Our intent is to be on campus, in-person, for fall 2020. We acknowledge there are caveats to that, and it may not look the way it did even three months ago. We don't yet know all of the realities we may need to confront, but our teams are working diligently to protect student success and our people as we navigate this new normal.

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