

**Local newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

As I think back on all we've navigated these last few months, I am reminded of the conversations with Northwest Missouri State employees when we entered the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of maintaining a tolerance for ambiguity. As a campus, a community and a nation, we must continue to practice care, compassion and empathy with one another. Understand the complexities and challenges of our situation – and be part of the solution.

Northwest employees have returned to campus – with COVID-19 mitigation measures in place – and buildings are now open to the public as the University recovers from the effects of the pandemic and prepares to begin its fall semester with classes on the campus. The University recently revised its fall 2020 academic schedule, with all on-ground and blended courses beginning as planned on Aug. 19 and continuing through Nov. 24, just before Thanksgiving. The week of Nov. 30 is designated as a preparation week for final exams, which will be delivered online during the week of Dec. 7.

Of course, as students and employees return to the campus, we are urging all individuals to continue practicing prevention measures, including frequent hand washing, social distancing of at least 6 feet and wearing face coverings. If you want to know more about Northwest's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, please visit our website at www.nwmissouri.edu.

As we move forward and prepare for the fall semester, we also continue to hold issues of race at the forefront. Our teams and I have shared numerous conversations internally, with stakeholders and with external partners, and we are working actively to address concerns raised this summer by our Black students and alumni. We have assembled an Issues of Race Action Team with the charge of pursuing actions and ensuring alignment with a developing Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Equity Scorecard as well as Northwest's Strategic Plan. Additionally, I have called for the formation of a President's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Team to advise me regarding diversity and inclusion issues.

There is much more to come on this topic as our discussions and planning evolve, including mandatory online diversity training for all employees, which we plan to release in mid-July and have completed by the start of the fall semester. We are listening, aligning and acting to embrace meaningful change on our campus.

Budget scenarios are impacting our fall planning, too. Gov. Mike Parson recently announced his signing of the state's FY21 budget along with appropriation bills passed by the General Assembly. He also shared that, for FY20, state revenues will finish approximately 7 percent down from a year ago, and that is expected to be nearly \$1 billion less than what was forecasted in January. To ensure Missouri is prepared for the economic impacts of COVID-19 moving forward, the governor issued vetoes for 17 items totaling nearly \$11 million. The governor announced more than \$448 million in budget withholds or expenditure restrictions.

These expenditure restrictions result in a reduction in Northwest's FY21 core appropriations of \$3.9 million, or 13 percent, which is the same amount we experienced in FY20. Our FY21

Education and General budget anticipated these reductions and addresses them through additional reductions and reallocations, including sacrifices in staffing and expense budgets as well as a use of general reserve funds not to exceed \$3 million – all of which was approved by the Board of Regents last month.

As we continue to prepare for the unknowns of COVID-19, the potential of additional changes in state appropriations and the volatility of enrollment, we have identified the reallocation of one-time funds. If revenues are negatively impacted beyond the current expenditure restrictions, impacts could include, for example, equipment purchases and capital improvements as well as personnel-related items such as reduced positions, salaries and benefits.

Gov. Parson has announced the availability of additional funds through the CARES Act, from both the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and the Coronavirus Relief Fund, to assist with expenses incurred as a result of COVID-19. The Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development also is working on guidelines for reimbursable expenses.

On behalf of Northwest, I hope you and your loved ones are doing well and are staying optimistic about the future as we – as a community and as a nation – focus on staying healthy, growing and succeeding.

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