

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Aug. 20, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

As I shared with faculty and staff during All-Employee Meetings last week, there is much to talk about – and so much change in play – as we begin the 2020-21 academic year. We are thinking ahead about the future of Northwest Missouri State University and doing it strategically as we position ourselves differently than our peers.

Throughout the summer, it's been gratifying to see so many people want to step out and be part of the solution. That, after all, is what we're all about at Northwest. We learn, connect, care, practice civility and show pride. My hope is that we continue to practice and model those expectations throughout the coming academic year.

Matters of COVID-19. As we open the campus for the fall during this COVID-19 era, change is everywhere to ensure Northwest is as safe of an environment as possible. As you walk through any building on campus, signage is everywhere. We've adapted our operations, gathering spaces, activities, course delivery modes, and the list goes on and on.

We also acknowledge there are risks and fears. While some of us share the anticipation and excitement of another fantastic semester at Northwest, we also recognize that emotions are mixed, and we respect that. We need to continue communicating with each other and share the good things we see as well as the anxiety we're feeling.

We are using incremental decision-making – hourly, daily, weekly – in our response to COVID-19 issues, and we'll continue to do that as we monitor a variety of metrics to guide us.

Matters of Budget. Northwest is no different than any other organization in our country when it comes to our budget. Whether we're talking about a K-12 school district, small business, manufacturer, service provider, non-profit or health care provider, all of us have been affected in some way. While I've described Northwest's budget as tenuous and foggy, I feel good about where Northwest stands in comparison to some of our peers.

Our state appropriations were cut 13 percent during the last quarter of the fiscal year, and we received a 13 percent cut, or \$3.9 million, to our core appropriations to begin FY21. To be sure, state appropriations for the rest of the fiscal year are uncertain.

Yet, I'm pleased to report that we have a balanced budget because of the work of so many. Our enrollment is projected to increase, but that is weighted by an increase in our Online Professional and graduate programming. We also could receive some federal and state monies, but those, if received, would be appropriated to plug holes opened for COVID-19 measures and will not supplant any decreases in our budget.

Moving forward, we remain focused on students, student success and our people as we work to protect the viability of the institution and our core competencies.

Matters of Race. When we talk about issues of race, we know we need to improve. We returned our equity initiatives to the Office of Student Affairs a year ago, with a focus on

compliance, and established an enhanced approach to diversity and inclusion with a focus on academics and the graduation rates of our Black students.

We are implementing a bias reporting system for students and employees, called the Bearcat Equity Program. We've enacted a President's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Team that brings together representatives from various underrepresented populations to provide a proactive platform to address structural and systemic issues of bias and racism. We've formed an Issues of Race Action Team to pursue actions and alignment with our Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Equity Scorecard as well as Northwest's Strategic Plan. We're also requiring an online training component for all employees as well as the members of our Board of Regents, Northwest Foundation Board of Directors and the Alumni Association Board of Directors.

We are evaluating spaces for a Black students and friends resource center on campus. As such, Karen Daniel, a 1980 alumna and dear friend of Northwest, has provided a transformational \$1 million cash gift to help us focus on that and other diversity and inclusion efforts. Karen's gift opens doors for us to uplift diversity and inclusion. Please join me in providing a heartfelt Bearcat thank you to her.

We, as a University, are focused on dismantling systemic racism and bias. As Bearcats, we have high expectations about how we treat each other, what we expect of our partners and of our community. In doing so, we're listening to so many groups and individuals. We're aligning with those who want to be part of the solution and the actions being offered. And we're acting on inputs.

I firmly believe in my heart and mind that we've placed ourselves ahead of many of our peers, and we will not just survive but be a stronger institution when we come out of this pandemic.

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