

**Local newspaper column
Thursday, Sept. 17, 2020**

Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President

In this era of COVID-19, budget challenges, matters of race and so much more, we are facing difficult issues every day at Northwest Missouri State University. But as we end this fifth week of classes on campus, it is important to take a step back and reflect on the many good things that continue to happen at our university.

For every piece of positive news, we discuss gaps and opportunities as well. While we are encouraged by the Northwest community's compliance with COVID-19 mitigation measures, we continue to look for ways we can improve, in addition to adjusting our processes. We continue to review and evaluate a variety of metrics as we make incremental decisions.

At the same time, we at Northwest must continue celebrating our people and milestones and moving forward on strategic objectives. A leading example of this is the results of our most recent Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, which relates to our Strategic Objective 1: Learners.

Northwest provides the student satisfaction survey every two years to freshmen and juniors, and the latest iteration given during the 2019-20 academic year shows Northwest students experience higher satisfaction than our national regional comparison groups – on every survey question and all scales. Of note, 82 percent of all Northwest students reported they would repeat their Northwest experience, compared to 75 percent of students surveyed nationally at their respective institutions. These results are significant and illustrative of our Northwest culture and the ways we align with our mission of focusing on student success – every student, every day.

Further, our first-day enrollment marked our third consecutive increase in total headcount. As of this writing we are finalizing our fall census data and believe we might even achieve the highest enrollment number in the University's history. Our retention rate is at its second-highest level ever, and our placement rates continue to put Northwest as a leader in the state, with 96 percent for undergraduates and 99 percent for graduates.

As we address Strategic Objective 2: Partners, we are thankful for the partnership of Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville and its president, Nate Blackford. Mosaic has done so much to assist Northwest as we navigate COVID-19, in addition to our partnership on athletic training and so much more.

Similarly, we are grateful to the Nodaway County Commission for its partnership to assist Northwest by granting funding for COVID-19 efforts. We also are indebted to the Nodaway County Health Department and the city of Maryville as they continue to be strong partners.

Kawasaki also is an important partner that does so much to support Northwest, our mission and our programs. Two years ago, we introduced Powering Bearcats, which encourages Northwest students to apply for well-paying part-time employment and provides leadership and engagement opportunities.

Strategic Objective 4: Ops focuses on disrupting and innovating our business model. As we talk about Bearcats learning, connecting, caring, practicing civility and showing pride, Northwest Foundation Board member Angela Moskow suggested to me that we add another – Bearcats give. Our Forever Green campaign has raised \$48.5 million to date, surpassing our initial goal by 108 percent. The campaign officially ends in the spring – but there are so many more ways to give as we approach the Bearcat Day of Green, Sept. 23-24, yet another effort to raise funds for several causes that will greatly impact our students.

Additionally, construction on the Agricultural Learning Center is progressing. Alumna Karen Daniel's recent \$1 million gift will have a significant impact as we enhance diversity and inclusion at Northwest. And our new lights at the Mark Rosewell Tennis Center are drawing many to campus for some nighttime tennis.

We continue to be methodical about enhancing learning spaces across campus and have made significant improvements in Colden Hall, Valk Center and Wells Hall. We're also beginning a \$1.4 million acoustical enhancement project in the Olive DeLuce Fine Arts Building. A project to replace the natural grass surface at Bearcat Pitch with turf is complete, as is the creation of a hub for our own Esports Club in the J.W. Jones Student Union.

We have so many stories to tell, and we are only beginning the 2020-21 academic year. We thank you for your support and strength and for what you – as members of our community – do every day to connect with our students, learn, show care, practice civility and show pride for Northwest.

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