

**Northwest focusing on success**  
**Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**

Bearcat greetings to you as we officially concluded the fall 2020 semester Dec. 11 at Northwest Missouri State University – and with that a year that has been marked by immense challenges but also Bearcats coming together in signature ways.

As Faculty Senate President Dr. David Shadinger and Staff Council Chair Troy Brady shared so well with our Board of Regents last week, Northwest confronted the challenges of this past year head-on and was successful because we did so together, through shared leadership and transparency about our budget, strategy and objectives, as well as our gaps. Coupled with our record enrollment and continued performance excellence, we set a bar this fall that few of our peers matched.

What our University teams have done, day in and day out, to support Northwest and help each other through the COVID-19 pandemic, is representative of the pride we share for the institution. Our processes have not been perfect and not without pain, but our work has centered on “Bearcats together,” maintaining our focus on health and safety, learning and overall vitality. It’s what we do at Northwest.

If this were a traditional semester in a non-pandemic year, we would have celebrated our graduates last weekend with commencement ceremonies in Bearcat Arena. Degree candidates this fall at Northwest comprised 673 students – 364 bachelor’s degrees, 298 master’s degrees and 11 specialist degrees. Elementary education was the most common bachelor’s degree in the graduating class, and applied computer science was the most common master’s degree. Our graduates represented 22 states – and included 429 from Missouri – and three countries. They ranged in age from 20 to 58 years old.

Additionally, Northwest’s Employee Recognition Dinner looked different this year, and we missed gathering together in our Student Union Ballroom but still dedicated Tuesday to recognizing individuals who have achieved milestone years of service at Northwest. This year, 96 employees have attained milestone years, dedicating a cumulative 1,285 years to the University. Leading this group are a quartet of 35-year employees – Dr. Kurtis Fink, associate professor of mathematics and statistics; Christina Heintz, senior instructor of mathematics and statistics; Dr. Ernest Kramer, professor of music; and Barbara Walk, payroll manager.

Furthermore, as we celebrate our graduates and our employees, we also celebrate a tremendous year for our Forever Green campaign as it heads into the homestretch toward conclusion in the spring. Recently, we surpassed the \$50 million mark in our fundraising efforts – more than \$5 million above our \$45 million goal.

While funding for the Agricultural Learning Center stands at 101.6 percent of goal, construction on that facility is past the halfway mark, and we are now projecting a summer completion.

Surveying the other areas of the campaign, we have achieved 121.6 percent of our funding goal supporting Invest in Northwest, an initiative to raise undesignated funds. We also have reached 115.1 percent of our goal for scholarships, 111.4 percent for academic excellence initiatives and 100.2 for student life initiatives.

It is noteworthy that the Northwest Foundation also will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2021, and we are looking forward to recognizing that achievement in conjunction with a gala to celebrate the closure of the Forever Green campaign.

As we opened the Northwest campus for the fall semester, change was everywhere – from the masks covering our faces and changes in the ways we gathered to the new modes of teaching in our classrooms. One thing the COVID-19 pandemic and the barriers we faced in 2020 could not change was our mission of focusing on student success. It has been gratifying to see so many wanting to support Bearcat Nation and be part of the solution as we worked to strengthen the University for the future.

Bearcat friends and community members, thank you for your support throughout a year that has been remarkable in so many ways. On behalf of the Northwest Leadership Team and my wife, Denise, and our family, I wish you well during this holiday season!

*Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest, visit [www.nwmissouri.edu](http://www.nwmissouri.edu).*