

**“Goodbye 2020” essay for Nodaway News Leader**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University President**  
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One can reflect on 2020 at Northwest Missouri State University through the lens of what we set forth as our guiding philosophy and framework in the pandemic’s early days: health and safety, agility and viability – with learning and success at the core of our decision-making. Through it all, we desired to be stronger coming out of the pandemic. I am proud to report that through teamwork and strong partners, our focal points were indeed front and center and in large measure, achieved. It was not perfect, there were missteps and, frankly, a great deal of anxiety, stress, scenario planning and consequential decisions. Yet, Northwest is on strong footing headed into 2021.

We credit our community-based partners – the city of Maryville, Nodaway County commissioners, Nodaway County Health Department and Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville. We thank all frontline workers, businesses and organizations who continued to work with Northwest and support our students.

Above all, we credit our faculty and staff for carrying out the daily work of all that goes into a vibrant learning environment. We wish to thank Dr. Jerry Wilmes, our executive medical director who retires Dec. 31 after a quite impactful 30-plus-year career at Northwest, and his team.

As we look to 2021, I will continue talking about and focusing upon the three areas I addressed during our 2020-21 academic year opening meetings in August: COVID-19, budget and race. We have used data and collaboration through a variety of teams to guide us on matters of COVID-19. We have focused on learning, our people and longer-term viability on matters of budget. And we have focused on listening, aligning and acting on matters of race.

Can you imagine, for example, breaking ground on an Agricultural Learning Center, opening a new esports venue, dedicating a Veterans Commons, installing a new soccer pitch, setting an all-time enrollment record, surpassing our Forever Green campaign’s \$45 million fundraising goal, committing to an inclusive excellence approach and supporting employees without reductions in force – all during a pandemic and through state budget cuts? At Northwest, we did not dream, we executed!

To be sure, challenges and opportunities persist. We all must remain vigilant in protecting each other’s health and addressing COVID-19. Northwest must continue being strong fiscal stewards, protecting and uplifting our people and providing the economic impact we do for our region. We must embrace inclusive excellence and focus on anti-racism as a broader community.

Yet, through Northwest’s resilience; focusing on goodness, good people and good partners; and knowing that Northwest has positioned itself with a stronger standing than many of our peers, my mindset is one of positivity, confidence and optimism headed into 2021. Also – with the increasing availability of coronavirus vaccines – thoughtful decision-making and continued agility will continue as we strive to provide the most robust experience possible for our students while maintaining a safe environment.

Community health, community mindedness. Bearcats together. Here’s to 2021!