

Newspaper column

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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University president

We are past the midway point of our spring semester, and the warmer weather is providing a renewed energy on the Northwest Missouri State campus. The 2020-21 academic year certainly is one none of us will soon forget, yet reminders remain that we cannot let issues of COVID and well-being slip from our radars. At Northwest, we are emphasizing the importance of continuing to follow local mitigation measures while taking care of ourselves and each other.

Vaccination clinics, in collaboration with Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville and the Nodaway County Health Department, are continuing at the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse with more than 3,000 individuals vaccinated. Our Wellness Services team also has administered about 100 vaccines to our campus community and is giving second doses to those individuals. With Gov. Parson's activation of Phase 1B - Tier 3, we are encouraged by the prospect of many more receiving the vaccine in coming weeks.

As we navigate the final weeks of the semester, this also is the season when we begin to finalize our budget for FY22. In doing so, we continue to be efficient in aligning with our mission and addressing the needs of the university. At minimum, we are planning for flat state appropriations and will continue to find ways to be efficient and resourceful.

After all, Northwest's core competencies encompass being safe, trusted, invested and resourceful, or STIR. We enjoy peer-leading metrics across so many measures, and we remain focused on affordability. We are projecting another overall increase in Northwest's enrollment in the fall, but that will come by way of online and graduate enrollment.

Additionally, a report released by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development in January shows Northwest is the most efficient among state universities for state appropriations per degree and certificate granted. Further, it shows that Northwest receives the second-lowest level of funding per full-time equivalent – all while we've experienced enrollment increases last fall and an all-time highest graduate enrollment this spring, in addition to those peer-leading metrics.

Not only are we trusted and invested, but we are the most resourceful in the state with the dollars we receive. Northwest's return on investment should be quite clear to all of our stakeholders.

Advancements on issues of diversity and inclusion remain a strategic imperative at Northwest, too. We recently published our Diversity and Inclusion 2020-21 Mid-Year Report, which is accessible at www.nwmissouri.edu/diversity/ and outlines our actions to enhance diversity and inclusion and address issues of race. We continue to listen, align and act on a variety of fronts.

Dr. Justin Mallett, Northwest's assistant vice president of diversity and inclusion, and his team also continue to lead training sessions, workshops and other educational opportunities – not just on campus but with community partners – that help create and foster an inclusive

environment. Among these are presentations on campus about microaggressions, implicit bias, power, privilege and oppression, as well as a variety of sessions with the Maryville R-II School District and the creation of a Community Diversity and Inclusion Committee consisting of ministers, the Greater Maryville Chamber of Commerce, business leaders and Northwest retirees.

We also opened a community barbershop in the J.W. Jones Student Union, which is open to all from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every Sunday in the diversity and inclusion area on the second floor of the J.W. Jones Student Union.

As I participate in diversity panels with other presidents through my service with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), hearing what other universities are doing has been an excellent learning experience. It supports what Northwest has learned and with what all of us are grappling.

As we look toward the fall, we are thinking about and articulating how the campus will return to what we know and love. We still have inflection points – some universities have stayed in a virtual model this spring – but as we think about our spring commencement, Summer Orientation Advisement and Registration (SOAR) and campus activities, things are trending well toward returning to a sense of normalcy.

Northwest's performance and culture sets us above and beyond so many others. Like all other organizations, we have gaps and opportunities, but Bearcats care, connect and are successful. We celebrate our culture and all things Northwest.

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