

Newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University president

Just one full week of classes remains in the spring semester before a week of preparation for our students, final exams during the week of May 3, and our spring commencement ceremonies as our culminating event May 6-8.

As I reflect on all that's occurred during the 2020-21 academic year at Northwest Missouri State University, I am full of pride when I think of the continued excellence and the new heights we have reached as an institution. We adopted the mantra of "Bearcats Together" when the pandemic hit last spring and have stayed true to it throughout, with student success at the forefront.

We welcomed a record enrollment last fall, opened an esports venue and dedicated our Veterans Commons. This spring, we recorded the highest graduate headcount in our University's history and brought home another NCAA Division II national championship in men's basketball. Further, we are concluding our Forever Green capital campaign this summer with a fundraising total that is nearing \$54 million and far exceeds our \$45 million goal. We also anticipate opening our Agricultural Learning Center in July at our R.T. Wright Farm.

We continue to outperform statewide peers in retention and had our second-highest ever retention rate in fall 2020 at 76 percent, while our second-to-third year persistence rate reached an all-time high of 85 percent. Additionally, a report released by the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development shows Northwest is the most efficient among state universities for state appropriations per degree and certificate granted.

Throughout the pandemic, we have been strategic and deliberate with our actions to assist students and maintain operations. We have focused on employment and protecting our people as one of the few Missouri institutions to not invoke layoffs, furloughs, reductions in force or salary cuts. We've maximized monies received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and made a difference for students. In fact, Northwest has distributed more than \$9 million, or 64 percent, of the CARES Act funding we received directly to students as assistance and refunds.

We also invested about \$3.9 million in CARES Act funding in remote learning needs, including training and technology such as cameras, headsets, Zoom licenses, and other pieces of classroom equipment to ensure learning at the University continued uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. We put another \$908,000 in CARES Act funding toward mitigation measures on campus – such as air purifiers, plexiglass and touchless faucets – to prepare and maintain facilities so we could remain operational. We invested nearly \$200,000 in testing and contact tracing as part of efforts to prioritize student and employee health and safety.

Northwest also is benefitting from CARES monies passed through other entities, highlighted by \$1.6 million in grant funding from the Missouri Department of Social Services to expand

early child care offerings. A remodel of our Phyllis and Richard Leet Center for Children and Families is underway to add a classroom for children from 6 weeks to 3 years of age and provide enhanced profession-based clinical experience for early childhood majors while providing a community hub for quality child care.

Additionally, \$2.78 million in CARES Act monies, through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, is assisting with deferred maintenance, including new roofs on Colden Hall, Garrett-Strong Science Building and Martindale Hall, and the removal of a water tower just west of Garrett-Strong.

We remain proud of our partnership with Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville and the Nodaway County Health Center to host vaccine clinics at the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse. With four more clinics planned, Northwest is not requiring the COVID-19 vaccination but advocating strongly for all students and employees to be inoculated.

We continue to use incremental decision-making as we plan for a fall that places us closer to pre-pandemic operations. We are planning for classrooms to be at full capacity as well as regular attendance at athletics activities and co-curricular events. Our team continues to meet weekly with the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development to gather and share information, and we remain aligned with the guidance of the CDC, the American College Health Association, the state and other organizations.

Challenges and opportunities persist at Northwest and in our community as I think about the lasting impacts of COVID-19 and uplifting our people, providing economic impact for our region and embracing inclusive excellence in our broader community. In one year, so much has happened, and Northwest will continue leading the way as "Bearcats Together."

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