

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

With the conclusion of our 2020-21 academic year at Northwest Missouri State University, I first say thank you to our faculty and staff. We cannot express enough gratitude for what our University has accomplished during the last year to sustain on-ground learning with record enrollment in the midst of a global pandemic. Final exams are complete and we celebrated our graduates during a weekend of eight commencement ceremonies May 6-8. The work of our faculty and staff and their commitment to Northwest has been nothing short of tremendous during this last year.

We are so proud of our graduates, too, as we celebrate all they accomplished at Northwest and the ultimate goal of obtaining a higher education degree – joining only four in 10 Americans who hold a post-secondary degree or credential of any sort.

Our commencement ceremonies celebrated 1,275 students who earned a degree – that is 761 bachelor's degrees, 452 master's degrees and 62 education specialist degrees. Elementary education was the most common undergraduate degree this spring, and education leadership in K-12 was the most common graduate degree. Our graduates ranged in age from 20 to 59, and they represent 33 states and 12 countries.

We also remember those who could not be with us this spring but live on in our hearts. That includes Kylan Harrell, a junior organizational communication major from St. Louis who was taken from us too soon last May. His impacts on our campus were many through his service as president of our Alpha Phi Alpha chapter, as a member of our Men's Minority Organization, as a student employee in campus recreation, and as a student representative for the Northwest Alumni Association's Black Alumni Chapter. We welcomed Kylan's family to accept a posthumous Bachelor of Science degree on his behalf.

Additionally, we congratulate our employees who completed degrees this spring. Bob Machovsky, director of alumni relations and annual giving, and Cassandra Tavorn, the director of our TRIO programs, completed their doctorate degrees in educational leadership and policy analysis through our collaborative program with the University of Missouri-Columbia. Also, Jamie Campbell, an advisor and coach in Academic Success and Retention, earned a Master of Business Administration degree; Leslie Huddleston, a custodian, completed her bachelor's degree in mass media with an emphasis in applied advertising, and Cody Hayes, a dispatcher in our University Police Department, completed his bachelor's degree in applied health with an exercise science emphasis.

Our graduates have persevered. They have contributed to our ongoing performance excellence. They have helped set the stage for the future as we work toward a more diverse and inclusive environment at Northwest and in the communities we serve. They have engaged in and out of the classroom, developing their skills to be successful as they join the workforce and serve the communities where they choose to live. They have connected with all of you – our faculty, staff, alumni and community.

As we close the academic year, I believe it is so important to show gratitude to those who have shown incredible service and dedication to Northwest. Among those are 10 faculty members who are retiring with a combined 251 years of service to the University – Nancy Farlow, Christina Heintz, Cindy Kenkel, Ernest Kramer, Brian Lanier, Brenda Lewis, Cheryl Malm, Mary Shepherd, Sue Wood and Lori Zech. They leave with so many memories and a lot to celebrate, and we wish each and every one of them the very best.

Our faculty are second-to none, and we also congratulate those who were granted tenure and promotions this spring. Congratulations to Richard Black, Cris Jacobson, Jackie Lacy, Mohammed Meziani, Tekle Wanorie and Patricia Warner on their promotions and to Katheryn Bilbo, Shantel Farnan, Robin Gallaher, Stephanie Jorandby, Jerry Qin, Linda Smith and Cindy Tu on receiving both promotions and tenure.

Additionally, we provide thanks to Troy Brady and David Shadinger, the outgoing presidents of our Staff Council and Faculty Senate, respectively. Their leadership has been superlative, and we are so pleased with our interactions and collaborations with their executive teams.

We talk often at Northwest about gratitude and what it means to be a Bearcat – Bearcats learn, connect, care, practice civility and show pride. We've been Bearcats this year. We're going to be Bearcats this summer. We'll be Bearcats next fall. We will continue uplifting our culture and getting after it – Bearcats together!

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