

**Newspaper column**  
**Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021**  
**Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University president**

When I addressed our faculty and staff at our All-Employee Meeting in August, as I do prior to the start of each semester, I asked, "Do you have GEPP?" That's grace, empathy, patience and a high positivity quotient, which I am encouraging our campus community to exhibit as we navigate the new academic year and continue to adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are pleased that our students are engaged in classrooms and activities, and a renewed energy exists on the Northwest campus this fall that was not present a year ago. We also are pleased by observations that our campus community understands the importance of following our COVID-19 mitigation measures, and adherence to our face covering requirement indoors is strong.

If the cancelation of our home opening football game last week is any indicator, COVID-19 remains a factor and we must stay vigilant. The state and local metrics we track are trending downward, but hot spots remain. We also are monitoring emerging variants and continue to advocate strongly for our community to maximize protection from COVID-19 and its variants by seeking the vaccine. We must dispel misinformation and help those who are resistant to the vaccine understand the value of it.

Despite these challenges, Northwest remains a vibrant place for learning and student success. We began the academic year last month with a 4.3-percent rise in total enrollment from a year ago, marking a fourth consecutive year of increased headcount while maintaining our high retention rate. Our enrollment totals include large increases in graduate student enrollment as well as international student enrollment.

Student Senate President Bailey Hendrickson might have said it best last week during her report to the Board of Regents when she noted that Northwest traditions and activities we couldn't participate in last year are happening again – from Greek recruitment to student organizations meeting in person. Hispanic Heritage Month activities, our fall Ploghoft Diversity Lecture, Family Weekend and Homecoming are all forthcoming.

We also encourage community members to visit our newly remodeled Office of Diversity and Inclusion on the second floor of the J.W. Jones Student Union. It features conference and lounge areas as well as a barbershop that offers hair styling and haircuts by appointment. We are thankful for Assistant Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion Dr. Justin Mallett and his team for their leadership as we continue to listen, align and act on addressing issues of race and diversity.

Last week, our fantastic Bearcat Marching Band, Bearcat cheerleaders and Bearcat Steppers performed in front of the Administration Building for a hearty crowd – a performance that campus television station KNWT also livestreamed online. And on Saturday we remembered the 9/11 attacks on our country with more than 125 people participating in a 2,071-step challenge at Bearcat Stadium to honor the firefighters who perished while rescuing others on that day 20 years ago.

Northwest also continues to reap the benefits of an exceptionally strong network of alumni, donors and friends, and for that we are thankful. While we continue to celebrate the success of our Forever Green fundraising campaign, which concluded during the summer with our announcement that it raised more than \$55 million. On Sunday, our donors came face-to-face with the scholarship recipients that benefit from their gifts during our annual Powering Dreams event.

Coming up, we are looking forward to Sept. 24, when our Northwest community honors 14 outstanding alumni, faculty and friends during our Alumni Awards Banquet at our new Agricultural Learning Center. Last year's banquet was canceled due to the pandemic, so this fall we honor our 2020 and 2021 award recipients – Sharon Cross Bonnett, Thomas Carneal, Bilal Clarence, Anne-Marie Clarke, JR Kurz, Jason McDowell, Jerry Moyer, Linda Nichols Place, John Richmond, Faith Spark, Dr. Tyler Tapps, the late Gary Thompson, Dr. Gretchen Thornsberry and Laura Widmer.

Our annual Missouri Hope emergency response field training exercise is Oct. 1-3 and brings together first responders and students from throughout the region for a full-scale disaster scenario at Mozingo Lake Recreation Park. Faculty members John Carr, Dr. Peter Adam and their teams do outstanding work each year to organize this experience and are once again calling for volunteers to participate as role players. Contact Peter at [padam@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:padam@nwmissouri.edu) if you are interested in participating.

Friends, although we live in strange and disruptive times, we have a great deal for which to be thankful. Be well, and keep flexing your GEPP!

*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).*