

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

We are past the mid-term mark of our fall semester at Northwest Missouri State University, and with Homecoming activities approaching next week, we are continuously building on our momentum and record of performance excellence.

Among numerous successes this fall, we are celebrating a record enrollment of 7,870 students, which amounts to an 8 percent increase, our fourth consecutive year of enrollment growth and our fifth enrollment increase in six years – bucking trends elsewhere. Northwest outperforms statewide peers and maintains a high retention rate with 76 percent of our fall 2020 freshman class returning this fall. That mark is tied for the second highest in the University's history – just behind our record 78 percent retention rate in 2018. Additionally, our sophomore retention rate is 82 percent this fall.

All this comes amid a tough recruitment cycle and a global pandemic. We remain agile and continue to monitor and evaluate our campus environment in alignment with local and regional health data. We have guideposts and continue to discuss scenarios, considering what we could see in the next week, two weeks or further in the semester.

Yet, we are pleased the vaccination rates of our Northwest population – at least 56 percent of students and at least 67 percent of employees, which are higher than county and state rates – are increasing. Case counts have stayed relatively low, and we have returned to a more traditional campus environment this fall.

As such, we have heard so many stories in recent weeks of our students, faculty and staff engaging at high levels in class, in student organizations and campus activities.

Earlier this month, we hosted our annual Missouri Hope emergency response field training, which is just one example of the many valuable profession-based experiences returning this fall. While the three-day, full-scale disaster scenario at Mazingo Outdoor Education Recreation Area (MOERA) brings together partners, first responders and students from throughout the region, this year's event attracted a record number of participating students and alumni as well as nursing students from Kansas and Oklahoma.

Emergency managers and military officers from across our region participated and shared a common view – that Northwest's program is unmatched in its ability to prepare future professionals in the emergency management field. Alumni who returned as volunteers have established themselves as experts in the field, and they consistently report that our program and the Missouri Hope exercise are reasons for their success.

Additionally, our Career Services programming has returned to a full slate of activities, which included our Career Day Sept. 28 in the Hughes Fieldhouse. Director of Career Services Hannah Christian shared that the employers with which she engages report our students are showing up for events at a rate of two to three times more than students on other campuses, both for virtual and in-person events. Hannah adds that our students also express deep appreciation for the ways Northwest faculty support and encourage them.

As we host Homecoming activities next week, we do hope you join us and participate in all our extraordinary Bearcat culture has to offer. Highlights include the International Flag-Raising Ceremony at the Joyce and Harvey White International Plaza on Fourth Street at 1 p.m. Friday, Oct. 29, and our M-Club Induction ceremony at 6:30 p.m. that night in the J.W. Jones Student Union Ballroom. On Saturday, Oct. 30, the Homecoming parade begins at 9 a.m. and travels east on Fourth Street to our downtown square. After that, join us at College Park for tailgate activities featuring the Bearcat Marching Band, cheerleaders and Bearcat Steppers, and our No. 10-ranked Bearcat football team kicks off against University of Nebraska at Kearney at 2 p.m. at Bearcat Stadium. Also, Homecoming weekend features our No. 6-ranked volleyball team at 6 p.m. both nights in the Hughes Fieldhouse.

Additionally, the Homecoming Committee and Student Senate are collaborating to host Northwest's annual fall blood drive, Oct. 26-28, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, in the Student Union's Tower View Room. And we are again inviting families into campus residence halls for a night of trick-or-treating from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 26. Details for these and so much more happening on the Northwest campus are posted to our university's online calendar at <http://calendar.nwmissouri.edu/>.

Community members, thank you for being recruiters and brand ambassadors of our great university. Thank you for carrying out our creed of Being a Bearcat. Keep connecting with our students, each other and our community.

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