

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

We are a month into the spring semester and what a great uptick in the Bearcat vibe – classroom and co-curriculum activities, numerous visit days, guest speakers, arts-based activities and performances, district conferences, competitions at the Hughes Fieldhouse and other community engagement activities – all laced with our ongoing focus on access to higher education, a high-quality product and an unending pursuit of student success.

This activity comes with the backdrop of much at play as we address enrollment, operations and so many of the elements comprising our strategic plan.

First, I am so very pleased to share that we have achieved the highest spring semester enrollment in the history of our institution. Overall enrollment is up by 5 percent from a year ago to a total headcount of 7,218 students. Further, we achieved our highest-ever overall fall-to-spring retention, 91.6 percent. As we say, everyone is a recruiter and everyone contributes to retention. These numbers are a credit to our teams and the outstanding work all of us do every day to recruit, retain and help our students persist toward the completion of their degrees.

In the meantime, we are pleased to see busses of prospective students and our visit days returning to some normalcy. As just one example, the Future Business Leaders of America district conference returned to our campus earlier this month, and we thank computer science and information systems faculty Nancy Zelif, Crystal Combs and Cari Cline for their work to organize that event. Last week we hosted Artopia, a first-ever event for high school students that consisted of a full day of workshops, a juried art exhibition and other contests, and we thank Assistant Professor of Art Veronica Watkins for spearheading it.

Among visit days and other upcoming activities for prospective students, our annual Distinguished Scholars Day is Feb. 19. Additionally, our Accepted Student Visit Day on Feb. 26 provides an opportunity for accepted students to visit the campus for fun, tours and engagement with faculty, staff and students.

Second, Gov. Mike Parson delivered his State of the State Address Jan. 19, and we are so appreciative of his support of higher education and his pledge to increase core appropriations by 5.4 percent, which translates for Northwest to about \$1.7 million or a 1.6 percent increase overall.

As we build our FY23 budget, our guiding principles are aligned with our strategic themes and continued focus on access and affordability. As I've stated, we find ourselves in a unique position as a result of the funding flowing to the state during the pandemic, but challenges remain. Balancing our tight budget involves addressing significant mandatory expense increases, the need for continued investment in our people and our strategic objectives, and addressing lost revenues related to first-time, full-time freshmen in the fall.

Our leadership teams are in a process of refining the budget, which continues through early April before we finalize it in May and take it to the Board of Regents in June.

Finally, in recent weeks, I had the pleasure on a couple occasions of representing Northwest on the national front. I was part of a panel discussing “Are We Student Ready? The Role of the Foundation” and addressed a standing-room-only audience at the Association of State Governing Boards (AGB) Foundation Leadership Forum in Florida. I also am serving on the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Postsecondary Value Commission (PVC) Taskforce with selected presidents from throughout the country. We met last week and continue to move on our action agenda to uplift the immense value of a public higher education.

I conclude with the two national callouts above because they exemplify Northwest Missouri State University’s statewide and national leadership focused on student success. I am thankful and thrilled to represent the work our faculty and staff do on behalf of our students. The impacts of their work are innumerable: uplifting individual and groups of students, highlighting our role as an economic and workforce engine, championing our status as a leader among peers, stamping our name as national leaders on student success – and so much more.

The spring 2022 semester is well underway! May commencement seems in the distant view – and yet it is just around the corner. Embrace your loved ones, enjoy each day, focus on those with positive energy and be headlights!

*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).*