JUST MESSED UP

The Breeze’s stance on JMU’s handling of COVID-19

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THE BREEZE
JMU’S AWARD-WINNING NEWSPAPER SINCE 1922

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The Breeze, the student-run newspaper of James Madison University, serves student, faculty and staff readership by reporting news involving the campus and local community. The Breeze strives to be impartial and fair in its reporting and firmly believes in First Amendment rights. Published on Thursday mornings, The Breeze is distributed throughout James Madison University and the local Harrisonburg community. Single copies of The Breeze are distributed free of charge. Additional copies are available for 50 cents by contacting our business office. Comments and complaints should be addressed to Katelyn Waltemyer, editor.

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LiveSafe app raises questions about confidentiality and effectiveness

BY JAKE CONLEY
The Breeze

In recent weeks, the LiveSafe mobile app has become JMU’s most emphasized public-facing measure for the encouragement of health on campus. And as classes begin, students have begun to receive daily notifications from the app that now governs their ability to enter campus. However, several questions — from enforcement to privacy issues — remain.

Speaking on why LiveSafe was chosen as the primary self-monitoring system for students, Caitlyn Read, university spokesperson and director of communications, said JMU ”[has] an existing relationship with LiveSafe” and that JMU has now adapted the app to meet public health needs during the pandemic to allow students to self-assess.

“We felt it was very important to just use a tool to self-screen for symptoms so that [students] would know and be aware of what the most common symptoms are but, sort of, self-assess and make sure that they’re safe to venture outside of their dorms or their off-campus residence,” Read said.

Answering questions about data privacy, in regard to medical privacy laws, Read said that the data submitted through the LiveSafe app — the answers to questions and the identities of submitters — is encrypted and routed directly to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). Carolyn Parent, CEO of LiveSafe, said that while LiveSafe offers several models for university use, JMU chose to receive names along with each survey submitted. Read confirmed that once OIR receives that data, two individuals who “handle the most sensitive data sets for the university” compile the screening results into an aggregated set with all personally identifiable data stripped out.

From there, Read said, a “simple [Microsoft Excel] sheet” is created by OIR that shows the day’s users and a report of how many users reported symptoms and how many didn’t.

That document is then shared with the University Health Center, President Alger’s leadership team and the human resources department, Read said.

“The data that is provided for the university is gonna be aggregate data that is stripped of personal identifiers,” Read said. “That data will be, sort of, disseminated with anybody who needs to be making decisions ... but it will not be individualized data.”

The screening asks five questions, including one’s email address, classification as a student or employee, whether one has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher, whether one has any of a list of common COVID-19 symptoms and whether one’s been instructed by medical personnel to self-isolate in the last 14 days. Yet, as Read stated, outside of OIR, what’s seen by JMU leadership is only an aggregate set displaying symptom prevalence and usage amounts with no personally identifiable information attached.

Parent also confirmed that LiveSafe — natively as well as in its partnership with colleges and universities — is compliant with medical law, both to maintain a compliance standard and to protect the privacy of its users.

“[What JMU leadership sees] is anonymized, so they don’t see the answers to the questions — they only see what the result was,” Parent said. “So, it’s HIPAA compliant, and it’s, you know, stored through LiveSafe and then purged through LiveSafe ... That just makes it easier so people can answer honestly, get their results set on, you know, ‘Yes, I’m good to go in,’ or, ‘No, I’m not,’ but they don’t have to have a concern that their individual, you know, questions that they answer would be seen by anyone.”

Additionally, Malli Neverovsky, vice president of LiveSafe’s global implementation services team, said the university receives the data logged by LiveSafe users “in real time.” Instead of being updated after a certain timeframe — such as on an hourly or daily schedule — the dashboard is updated on a rolling basis as students submit their surveys, Neverovsky said.

However, Read also emphasized that “the whole purpose of this app is not data.”

She said that while the data is helpful in giving JMU a wide-angle view of symptom prevalence in its student body, the use of the app is more for the students than the university, as it serves as a reminder for students to look out for their health and self-monitor.

“The data is wonderful to have, it paints a more holistic picture, but it isn’t definitive,” Read said. “It’s so that students are reminded to be self-aware and to recognize these symptoms and then to tell them exactly what to do should they be experiencing symptoms — that’s the whole purpose.”

Yet while the app may be primarily designed as a self-screening tool, it also has a function for anonymous tip reports, raising questions of enforcement and how JMU would be able to mandate usage of the app and the following of its public health policies.

In response, Read said that goes hand-in-hand with the agreement students had to sign on MyMadison to begin the semester, which requires all signatories to follow all of JMU’s new health policies. In terms of enforcement, Read said it’ll be handled on a “case-by-case basis based on the severity of whatever the violation is.”

Read said that the tips from LiveSafe are routed to the JMU Police Department (JMUPD), but JMUPD will most likely not serve as the immediate enforcement. Instead, the tips are passed along to different offices around campus — typically the human resources office, the University Health Center, President Alger’s leadership team and the human resources department, Read said. That document is then shared with the tips to the students, such as the offices of academic and student affairs. Read added that one part of the rerouting of tips to other offices is that JMUPD’s enforcement capability is restrained to state code policies, meaning that their jurisdiction doesn’t include many of JMU’s new COVID-19 health policies.

“JMUPD does not have the resources to dispatch every time somebody is reported to not be wearing a mask or to have been seen with a red X,” Read said. “JMUPD’s role in this is going to be to parse out the tips to the applicable leaders across campus.”

Read continued, saying, “More realistically, if [JMUPD] was seeing multiple reports about, maybe, a classroom where multiple people were not wearing masks or there wasn’t appropriate physical distancing, they would take that step and they would send it over to [the Office of Academic Affairs].”

However, even with LiveSafe and other public health measures in place, Read said that the university is relying on students and employees to self-police themselves and their peers.

“Students are going to be responsible for policing themselves,” Read said. “We need students to make really good decisions, recognizing that the decisions they make are not only going to impact them — they’re going to impact their peers, their faculty, their community at large who could potentially put us in a situation where we again have to pivot to online learning.”

Read said that on the first day of classes, the university recorded 13,239 usages of the app, which Read called “a pretty good saturation of our students and of our employees,” and which she said tells the university that students are “doing exactly what they’re supposed to be doing” — a sentiment shared in President Alger’s email to students, subject-lined “Cautious Optimism.”

As JMU moves further into the fall semester, Read said that “[JMU feels it has] a really solid structure in place” for its enforcement of public health policy — LiveSafe is one more aspect of that structure.

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By KAMRYN KOCH
The Breeze

In March 2019, Harrisonburg City Council adopted regulations that legally allowed city residents to operate short-term rentals. Harrisonburg Director of Communications Michael Parks said City Council has since approved a separate category of rentals known as “homestays,” which have a shorter approval process than short-term rentals.

“You would assume that homestays are going to be less impactful on local infrastructure in a neighborhood than a short-term rental could possibly be,” Parks said.

The differences
Homestays have a limit of operating up to 90 nights per calendar year, Assistant Director of Planning and Zoning Thanh Dang said, while short-term rentals don’t have a limit. She also said that homestays can have a maximum of four guests, while short-term rentals have no maximum guest number.

Dang said as city staff became familiar with short-term rental applications, they started to notice commonalities. She said this spurred a conversation to introduce a way for those who wish to operate a short-term rental to bypass the usual two to three month special use permit approval process if they meet certain criteria.

Homestays approved
Parks said community development director Adam Fletcher presented the proposed changes to City Council during its meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 25. Council members Richard Baugh, George Hirschmann and Sal Romero voted in favor of the ordinance change with Chris Jones abstaining.

“City Council and staff wanted to give homeowners the option of being able to generate some revenue from their homes,” Parks said. “It’s something we’ve been wanting to allow people to do while being mindful of some regulations and concerns that those individuals have to take into account.”

The special use permit approval process requires a staff review, planning commission review and approval by City Council, Dang said, in addition to an annual $25 registration fee. Now that homestays have been accepted, she said the approval process for applications that meet homestay requirements will be much shorter. She said homestay operators must still pay an annual registration fee.

According to the PowerPoint presented by Fletcher available on the City of Harrisonburg’s website, short-term rentals and homestays both must be at the operator’s primary residence, and if the operator isn’t the property owner, then the operator must be present during the lodging period. The PowerPoint also states that both are allowed in all zoning districts that residential uses are allowed and that lodging periods at both are limited to less than 30 nights.

Homestays and JMU students
Dang said both short-term rentals and homestays are allowed in single-family detached, duplex and townhomes. They’re not allowed in apartments, she said, which she said she thinks will deter JMU students from operating homestays because it’d require them to pursue a special use permit.

“I haven’t received any questions from JMU students who have expressed interest or curiosity about whether they can operate a short term rental or homestay,” Dang said. “I think that would be too much of a hurdle for some people to go through.”

According to the PowerPoint, homestays have no off-street parking requirements, while short-term rentals require one off-street parking space for each accommodation space. Parks said parking and traffic concerns often come up when residents object to short-term rentals.

Hirschmann said he understands public concerns about short-term rentals and homestays. As a child, Hirschmann said, he grew up in a household where his parents rented out their third floor to guests.

“I kind of grew up in that atmosphere,” Hirschmann said. “I’m not averse to it if everybody plays by the rules.”

Parks said before COVID-19, many people would come into the community looking for short-term rentals or hotel lodging to explore the city or the university. He said JMU orientation, football games and commencement would bring possible short-term rental guests. However, he said the pandemic may have an impact on travel, so the demand for short-term rentals or homestays may not be as high.

CONTACT Kamryn Koch at kochkr@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage of JMU and Harrisonburg news, follow the news desk on Twitter @BreezeNewsJMU.

Homestays have a limit of operating up to only 90 days, but short-term rentals don’t have a limit. Breeze file photo
O Say, Can You Sing?

Interested in auditioning this winter for our home basketball games? Please send your virtual audition to DukeDog@jmu.edu
JMU spokesperson comments on university's transition to ‘primarily online’ instruction

Following JMU’s official announcement to move to an online-only instruction model by Sept. 7, Caitlyn Read, JMU spokesperson and director of communications, was interviewed by The Breeze.

Read described the lack of quarantine and isolation space and a “sharp uptick” in cases over the weekend, primarily self-reported, as the breaking point that led to the decision within the administration to modify class instruction.

“We became concerned about that capacity,” Read said. “Those two factors combined led us to make the announcement today to transition to online learning for at least the next four weeks.”

Read said the decision was made Tuesday morning after senior leadership met with university medical experts, as they’ve done since the start of the semester, to review the case data and make decisions about the university’s plans moving forward.

Regarding the university’s decision to send freshmen home by Sept. 7, Read said students in quarantine should finish their prescribed time in isolation prior to returning home to minimize the likelihood of bringing the virus to their home community.

When The Breeze asked Read what caused the several public health discrepancies that could’ve led the case count to new heights, Read said that there are “a number of factors” that lead to JMU’s case count, but she said she knows that most cases generated from students socializing in close proximity to each other and “sometimes without masks.”

Since dining halls and libraries will still be open, students will still have to adhere to health guidelines. While students have reported large gatherings on campus via social media, Read said that these safety regulations should be reported to administration as well.

“Social media is useful in some contexts,” Read said. “But if you’re seeing something, say something to your advisor, contact the Dean of Student Affairs. If your safety feels threatened, contact public safety, just make sure the administration is seeing that stuff.”

Read said JMU will use its newfound time to plan how the university will keep students safe in the event they return to campus later in the year. It’ll also look into acquiring more space for isolation beds.

Read also said the university is unable to comment on any financial kickback from the decision at this time.

Read said most COVID-19 cases at JMU generated from students socializing. Christine Brady | The Breeze

Read said on-campus infected students should finish their quarantine before returning home.
Christine Brady | The Breeze
On Aug. 25, Harrisonburg City Council approved the Harrisonburg Electric Commission to move forward with plans for a community solar program. With this approval, the HEC can purchase 9.9 acres of land located at the northeast corner of Acorn Drive and N Liberty Street to be developed for solar power energy usage.

The HEC will use this avenue to put renewable energy on the grid and progress toward a greener city.

Brian O’Dell, the general manager of the HEC, said that the push for solar panels began years ago in response to the Harrisonburg community seeking more renewable energy options.

“We have felt for a long time that the community had been looking for us to do something along these lines,” O’Dell said.

Daphyne Thomas, chairperson for the HEC, also said that the HEC turning to more renewable energy options is something the community has been looking forward to for a long time. This project has been in the works for the past three years, and she said it took many people involved to bring this together.

“We feel confident that we’re making a step forward in terms of being responsive to the needs of the environment, and being responsive to what the community has indicated is a priority,” Thomas said.

O’Dell said the program would be entirely voluntary and that there’d be a limited number of subscribers, as the solar space is limited. The plant’s power supply will be enough to power 250 homes annually. Customers would be able to opt in for a premium.

Thomas said she thinks the community will react well to this decision and that people would be willing to use the sustainable energy option.

“We feel confident that there are many like-minded people in the community who see reduction of carbon emissions as a priority and would be willing to participate in this,” Thomas said.

While the HEC predicts that many homeowners in Harrisonburg will use this option, Thomas said she foresees some businesses taking advantage of this opportunity to use sustainable energy, as well.
Jo Anna St. Clair, chair of the Climate Action Alliance of the Valley (CAAV), said she was happy about the City Council’s decision but hopes to see more action in the future.

“It is a great step forward,” St. Clair said. “We just think there is more that could’ve been done and more questions that could’ve been raised. We want the city to move closer to its recently adopted Environmental Action Plan and closer to the goals of ‘50 by 25.’”

“50 by 25” is a term used for Harrisonburg’s goal of using 50% renewable energy by 2025. It’s used commonly among many environmental organizations and green energy activists. St. Clair said that while it’s a high goal, it’s better to aim high when it comes to reducing carbon emissions and increasing options for greener energy.

CAAV is trying to push the city to be more specific with its Environmental Action Plan and set specific guidelines for a more sustainable community.

St. Clair said that she’s concerned that a third party owning the solar panels could possibly bump up energy costs, even for those not using solar energy. She also said the premium cost of solar energy would prevent low-income residents and small businesses from getting involved in the program.

“We just think the City Council needs to consider how this plan benefits everyone, especially the lower-income residents and small businesses,” St. Clair said. “With the ongoing housing crisis the city is facing, St. Clair said it could’ve been beneficial to use the land to build more moderate housing and that the HEC could’ve added the solar panels onto homes. She said that overall, she wished the city had more conversations about this decision in public to get the community’s perspective and that she’s curious to see how the HEC decision aligns with the Environmental Action Plan.

O’Dell said he doesn’t expect the solar panels to be built until mid-to-late 2021. He also said that the HEC has plans to pursue even more renewable energy in the future.

“There are many opportunities for the HEC to partner with the city and move forward in this mission,” Thomas said. “We all have a responsibility to the needs of climate change and what’s happening. I think we will see various other agencies move forward from this.”

St. Clair said she’s hopeful for the future of sustainable energy in Harrisonburg and plans to still use her voice to leave a positive mark on the city.

“I can’t give you all of the science, but I do know the broader events of what’s going on [with the climate], and I do know that regular people have to speak up, so that’s what I’m doing,” she said.

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DEFUND THE POLICE

Reallocating funds is a start, but that won’t erase the history of systematic oppression

LIZ RICCI | contributing writer

As social media has become flooded with posts supporting Black Lives Matter, detesting police brutality and raising awareness of the racial injustices across the country, many are vying to find solutions to bring about justice.

Protests have been organized across the country, murals have been painted in prominent cities and hundreds of petitions have been circulated online. But, many think that this movement should be taken one step further by confronting the root of the problem — law enforcement and their senseless killings and inadequate response to horrific instances of racial injustice.

Law enforcement has been corrupt from its beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According toTIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginning. According to TIME, many of the first police forces in the North were formed for the beginn

The Breeze welcomes and encourages readers to voice their opinions through letters and guest columns. Letters must be no longer than 250 words. Guest columns must be no more than 600 words. 

Liz Riccio is a Media arts and design and psychology double major. Contact Liz at ricciolm@dukes.jmu.edu.

Letters and guest columns should be submitted in print or via e-mail and must include name, phone number, major/year if author is a current student (or year of graduation), professional title (if applicable) and place of residence if author is not a JMU student.
Well, that went well

It’s hard to be a Duke right now. It’s hard to know so many fellow Dukes who are sick. Now that JMU has the highest number of COVID-19 positive cases out of all Virginia public colleges, it’s frustrating to be a Duke. As a school that leads itself on civic engagement, it looks like JMU has missed its own mark of holding itself accountable.

As JMU students, it’s disappointing to see the university using the idea of “student policing” as a scapegoat. Yes, people were wearing masks. Yes, every other chair was roped off in classrooms. Yes, there was hand sanitizer everywhere. Yes, there were cleaning blocks. Despite all these efforts, the virus still spread.

Before students stepped on campus, we were slapped with the concept of “student policing,” which is the idea that we need to hold each other accountable. We need to call people out for not wearing masks. We need to say something when we see a party. We need to social distance.

JMU has repeatedly taken to social media, and its communications director and spokesperson, Caitlyn Read, has even applauded students for following the health and safety guidelines on campus.

Meanwhile, the University Health Center is turning people away who don’t have appointments. The Breeze recently received a tip from a student who came in contact with COVID-19. She said that when she called the health center, the individual who answered the phone instructed her to continue going to her in-person classes.

Right now, Dukes are being pulled in every direction by the university. Don’t go to class if you’ve come in contact with someone who has COVID-19. Go to class if you’ve come in contact with someone who has COVID-19. Make up your mind.

Many students and parents have reached out to The Breeze to express their distaste and concern regarding the way the university has decided to operate surrounding COVID-19. JMU students on social media are dissatisfied with the actions the university has taken to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

Harrisonburg residents were worried about a JMU outbreak. The city has seen a near-vertical increase in cases since its population nearly doubled with the return of students. We’ve heard from countless residents who are afraid to go to work or the grocery store.

The bottom line is, more should’ve been done to protect JMU students and Harrisonburg residents from this foreseeable spike of COVID-19 cases. While the university used hope and positivity to encourage students to come back to campus, it wasn’t enough to stop the virus in its tracks.

All or the majority of classes should’ve been online in the first place. Students should’ve been allowed to deliberately opt into online-only classes for this semester, allowing them to stay home and limit the number of people in Harrisonburg.

But this wasn’t an option. There were classes with more than a hundred students that offered less availability for social distancing and required some students to sit on the floor in groups. Some students were forced to attend in-person classes where they felt uncomfortable due to rigid attendance requirements.

At this point, many in the JMU community think that the university cares more about its revenue than its students. It’s not hard to understand why they feel that way. First, JMU has been handling this semester before class even began. Second, the university hasn’t even begun discussing potential refunds for students.

JMU is also keeping its dining halls open, which does nothing to stop the spread of COVID-19 and will possibly prevent students from getting refunds.

Offering a lower tuition price for a semester of online classes would’ve been a wise decision to keep students dedicated to JMU instead of looking for education elsewhere at a more affordable price, especially with so many struggling financially during the pandemic.

By assuring students that JMU would open as usual, with precautions to keep them safe and an assortment of classes either online or hybrid, the university retained its students’ trust and their tuition revenue.

JMU took advantage of trust from the incoming freshman class. These students moved in a week ago, some of whom are out-of-state students who now have to scramble to figure out how to get home. Several obstacles come with this: time, money and the ability to safely arrive home without getting anyone sick. Was it worth it?

This reopening experiment was a massive failure for JMU. Students and Harrisonburg locals alike will be ailed with long-term health complications, the local economy will take another hit and off-campus students will inevitably be stuck in unnecessary leases.

Classes need to move fully online and stay that way until the end of the semester, at least. It’s become clear that wearing masks and socially distancing from one another isn’t enough to stop the spread of COVID-19. Students have had enough with the secrecy and false positivity in the wake of their fellow Dukes falling ill.

The Breeze’s Editorial Board represents the official stance of the paper on important issues such as this one. For more information, contact Editor-in-Chief Katelyn Waltemyer at breezeditor@gmu.edu.
With the rise of COVID-19 in the U.S., going out becomes a calculated risk. COVID-19 isn’t particular about who it affects, and it’s difficult to predict the force of its attack. How can someone know if they’re safe? For many people, it’s tempting to lean on the promise of herd immunity. If one’s healthy enough, has had COVID-19 or the people around them seem healthy, then it’ll probably be fine, right?

Not exactly. Herd immunity is a complicated concept and not yet well understood in relation to COVID-19. Herd immunity to COVID-19 cannot yet be relied upon to protect the population, and all restrictions shouldn’t be lifted yet in favor of this strategy.

Herd immunity is like the Superman of the epidemiological world — a force that can be relied upon to save unsuspecting citizens from peril. When a large enough percentage of the population has been exposed to a disease, enough people are immune to protect the immunocompromised and to slow its spread. But, herd immunity doesn’t necessarily occur naturally. In fact, herd immunity doesn’t necessarily occur naturally. In fact, herd immunity is the result of vaccines.

This is why so many people are used to preexisting herd immunity. Devastating illnesses such as the measles, polio, the mumps and the flu now have vaccines, which are required to attend school in the U.S. Many in the U.S. haven’t witnessed an outbreak of disease during which everyone feared for their lives until now. No wonder it’s easy to assume immunity to COVID-19 is similar to the other diseases.

The fact is, no vaccine has been proven effective, and experts are unsure whether having contracted COVID-19 means someone is truly immune. Compared to most people’s experience of herd immunity, COVID-19 is different, at least for now.

There’s uncertainty, too, about what percentage of the population must be immune to COVID-19 for local or national herd immunity to be effective. That number is high for other diseases, however, with 19 out of 20 people needing to be vaccinated for measles in order to protect those who aren’t as well as themselves.

Although some of life is returning to a pre-pandemic state, many communities are still at risk. For instance, researchers in India have found that COVID-19 may infect more of those with lower economic status or poor living conditions. Additionally, communities that suffered less during initial outbreaks may be especially damaged by later waves. With reinfection a possibility, many people are still at high risk.

Herd immunity isn’t up to random exposure. Allowing people to go and live normally doesn’t necessarily translate to greater immunity over time — it’s developed largely through vaccines, which the U.S. doesn’t have yet. Herd immunity is a powerful weapon, but only with the aid of vaccines and other precautions to slow the spread of disease. Face masks, social distancing and closures help limit the spread of disease, which is essential to the development of herd immunity. Many people will likely be immune to COVID-19 in the future, but it’ll certainly take more time.

For the most part, people are used to preexisting herd immunity. COVID-19 is a particular beast because it’s perhaps the first disease in years to affect such a large number of people in the United States. There’s also virtually no herd immunity to COVID-19 thus far when compared to something like the flu or measles. Though developing herd immunity is important, the population can’t count on herd immunity to shield themselves or the immunocompromised just yet. Exercising caution until a vaccine is widely available makes sense, especially if herd immunity is the goal.

COVID-19 can affect anyone, and no one is automatically immune. Developing herd immunity isn’t an excuse to float rules and regulations. Vaccines won’t make everything better, but they’ll make the reduction of restrictions more responsible.

If those that are able to mask up and do their part reduce their potential to spread COVID-19, herd immunity can once again take its place as the first line of defense.

Caroline Rose is a sophomore writing, rhetoric and technical communication major. Contact Caroline at roseck@dukes.jmu.edu.
OPINION

How will JMU protect Title IX cases?

JENNA HORRALL | contributing writer

Recent updates were made to federal Title IX rules that’ll negatively affect students across America — except those who’ve been accused of sexual harassment or assault. All universities that receive federal funding are updating their student handbooks with new changes, and there’ll be serious consequences for those who experience sexual assault after these revisions officially go into effect.

On May 6, 2020, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos released new Title IX changes that were accepted by all federally funded schools by Aug. 14. The collection of policy changes, known as the “Final Rule,” include updated regulations that state how public schools will handle cases of sexual assault, abuse and harassment under federal law.

One major update to the Title IX process is that schools are no longer required to investigate off-campus incidents. According to knowyourix.org, “schools must dismiss any complaints of sexual misconduct that occur outside of campus-controlled buildings and/or educational activities.” If someone’s assaulted at an off-campus apartment, universities are no longer federally obligated to continue the case. Study abroad cases will no longer be covered because those cases aren’t considered to have happened in campus-controlled buildings.

Because off-campus incidents will no longer be within JMU’s jurisdiction, reported cases will go to the Harrisonburg Police Department. According to rainn.org, 3 out of 4 cases aren’t reported to authorities because of fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, worry about whether the police would actually do something or other similar reasons. Cases that involve students who experience sexual violence at an off-campus location are no longer under the school’s jurisdiction, and this is now backed by federal law.

Why is the federal government trying to roll back protections for those who experience sexual assault? In the new Title IX policies, the definition of sexual harassment has been narrowed to include only instances that are “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive.” This will limit cases to incidents that comply with this definition, and something that’s severe in the eyes of one person may not be considered that way by others. This will further narrow what’s considered sexual harassment and lower protections for survivors.

So, what’s JMU doing about this? The new policy updates give universities some leeway to implement their own code of conduct to handle cases. Administrators and lawyers are currently working on what JMU can still do to protect those who experience sexual assault to the highest degree while also following the new federal rules. After contacting the Title IX office, which referred me to a director of OSARP, I received this response via email: “...the university, including OSARP, is still working on the process, policy and procedures that will be used for sexual misconduct that falls outside of the Title IX policy.”

Universities have a record of excusing perpetrators far too often. Most students want to believe that schools will act in students’ best interest and protect those who experience sexual assault, but by restricting cases to instances that occur on campus, schools won’t be held responsible for students’ actions simply because of the location of cases. The fewer Title IX cases that JMU handles ultimately lead to less resources needed to handle Title IX, which may equate to a financial gain for JMU as they can reap the benefits of no longer being on the hook to handle these incidents.

Students won’t know JMU’s specific implementation of the Final Rule until the new policies have been released by OSARP. The Title IX office assured me that all cases involving JMU students, both off and on campus, are being investigated as of Aug. 26, 2020. After the new policies and procedures are outlined by OSARP, those same protections may drastically change.

It’s up to the JMU administration to do what’s right and protect its students to the fullest extent while remaining legally protected by federal guidelines. History shows that just because something’s legal doesn’t mean it’s right, which leads to the ultimate question: Will the JMU administration act in its own financial or legal interest and fully comply with federal law, or will it be on the right side of history and protect those who experience sexual assault?

Jenna Horrall is a senior computer science major and sociology minor. Contact Jenna at horraljk@dukes.jmu.edu.
By CHARLOTTE MATHERLY
The Breeze

As classes started Aug. 26, many students returned to a campus they had never seen before — a campus filled with hand sanitizer stations in every classroom, plastic dividers in front of every podium and alternate seats ripped off.

This is a campus that has stickers on the floor where lines form, marked 6 feet apart. This is a campus where every student, professor and staff member wears a mask as far as the eye can see.

Months of planning and precautions led to the start of in-person classes at JMU. Five days into the semester, JMU announced that the majority of classes would transition to an online or hybrid format, sending most on-campus students home. After an interrupted spring semester and a hopeful launch into the fall semester, many students may feel upset or disappointed about the transition.

Here’s how students viewed the news.

FRESHMAN FRUSTRATION

Parker Boggs, a freshman political science major, said he was shocked when he received the email and that he’d expected to go online at some point but not this quickly.

“I understand where they’re coming from, but obviously it’s going to impact a lot of students negatively,” Boggs said. “I think we should have known a lot earlier than what was already given.”

Elizabeth Marcheschi, a freshman elementary education major, said campus safety rules weren’t being enforced. She said she’s known of parties that have gotten off with warnings and some people who’ve received more than one warning but no corrective action.

“I was very upset and, like, frustrated more so than anything,” Marcheschi said. “I think they made it seem like they had everything under control before we got onto campus, but, being on campus, it seems like they really haven’t.”

She also said that going home would create a difficult situation in terms of finding suitable study spaces with parents, siblings and pets.

“This is, like, the time where you’re supposed to understand your studying habits and get used to the whole transition of not being at home,” Marcheschi said.

PROFESSORS HAVE BEEN PREPARING FOR THE INEVITABLE TRANSITION

Javier Calleja, an adjunct professor in the Spanish department, said he thought JMU had enacted thoughtful precautions.

“The leadership is strong,” Calleja said. “I can’t imagine that any decision ever has been made without taking the students and the community into account.”

However, Calleja said, he’s been preparing for most of the summer to transition to online classes and is ready for anything.

Although he said he values the physical presence of students in a classroom and the quality of communication that can happen in-person, Calleja must now transition the entirety of his class to an online lecture format.

“It just ruined my whole day,”

Nick Russell, a freshman history major, said he was exercising when his dad called him, shocking him with the news of the transition to online courses.

“I was very upset and distraught … I was like, are you serious?” Russell said. “It just ruined my whole day.”

He’d expected this announcement from JMU, he said, but he had no idea it’d happen this early in the semester. He also said he felt that the dining areas on campus were overcrowded and not monitored enough. He suggested that JMU should’ve closed on-campus dining options to people who live off campus, making the first floor halls a safer area for on-campus residents to eat.

Russell said that he personally learns better in a classroom.

“It’s just gonna be way harder and, like, not a good experience,” Russell said. “I feel like we shouldn’t be paying full tuition for online classes at home.”

INSIGHT FROM AN ALUMNUS

Alumnus Matt Bosek (‘18) expressed his worries about students returning to campus. He said he’s encouraging his undergraduate friends to take a semester or a year off.

“Why are people putting themselves in danger just for an education?” Bosek said. “There are workers’ rights. Why aren’t there more. I don’t know, students’ rights? I’m just very angry that my friends are having to make tough choices that they shouldn’t be having to make in the first place.”

Bosek also said he thinks JMU has a “vested interest” in students returning physically to campus because the school makes more money that way. He said JMU has been building up its athletics, food choices and other aspects of in-person experience to attract students to the campus, but if the school can function with remote classes for a sustained period of time, people may realize they don’t need all the attractions.

“I think it shatters the illusion that you need all this stuff and that it’s worth something for an American education,” Bosek said. “With the rising cost of education, it’s getting harder and harder to justify this … I think they’re seeing you more like nickels and dimes than actual people, and that, kind of, really pisses me off because my friends are way more than that to me.”

As of Sept. 7, students will be going online — Bosek’s wish came true.

THwarted opportunities for social life on campus

“When I first heard about it, I was like, this isn’t real,” Kurt Jacoby, a freshman health sciences major, said when he first heard the news. “I went through all the emotions: shocked, sad, surprised, mad, all of it.”

He said he feels like everyone on campus is angry, from freshmen who just moved in to seniors who’re seeing their remaining time at college slip away. He was excited to get involved with social life on campus in his first year, he said, but he feels like that hope has been crushed now that classes are moving online.

Jacoby said he has no plan of how to get home on such short notice and will need to figure out packing and transportation on the fly.

Some may feel relieved about the transition

Kristien Szakal, a senior industrial design major, said she wasn’t thrilled to be back on campus. She said personally, she’s afraid of getting the virus and struggles with anxiety about her own safety as well as that of JMU and Harrisonburg communities.

She said she doesn’t believe JMU has been forthcoming or transparent about the situation and what it would take to move classes online.

Now, she has her answer.

Szakal also said she felt it was careless on JMU’s part to bring the student population back to Harrisonburg, a small town with over 1,000 cases already. A COVID-19 outbreak is inevitable, she said, and many students will be forced to go home when courses move online.

[Harrisonburg residents] can’t leave the same way we can,” Szakal said. “I think it’s really irresponsible … not listening to a lot of students’ and parents’ concerns about the pandemic.”

A confused RA sympathizes with freshmen

Adrianna Rippon, a sophomore media arts and design major, said she was attending a class in The Breeze’s TV studio when she heard the news, and the class erupted into nervous excitement.

She said that as a resident advisor, she wishes she could comfort and inform her residents, but she’s equally as confused and shocked as they are.

She said she believes JMU will ask RAs to remain on campus but will be given an opportunity to leave if they feel unsafe. She hopes to stay in her dorm, she said, and interact with her residents as often as she can over Zoom.

“I’m only a sophomore,” Rippon said. “So, I definitely understand what it’s like to be in your freshman year and have it ripped away from you. And, [to] have it be your first semester, I think that’s even worse.”

JMU’s response to community concerns

In an interview with The Breeze last week before the transition to online learning was announced, JMU’s university spokesperson and director of communications, Caitlyn Read, responded to some of the concerns held by students like Szakal. She said JMU was continuing to do everything possible to make the semester safe and beneficial for the entire community.

“We recognize that there are people who feel all kinds of ways about this pandemic,” Read said. “There are students who are thrilled to be back in a residential environment. This is the most secure home they’ve ever known.”

She said JMU has worked closely with local authorities and healthcare facilities to monitor the situation. The administration is doing the best they can, Read said, but there are many factors the university can control, and we are controlling all of the variables that we can.

With 627 coronavirus cases and only 54 remaining quarantine beds, JMU has made the decision to transfer to online courses — at least until Oct. 5, when students may be able to return to campus if the situation improves.

In an interview with Breeze TV on Tuesday, Read said the administration had been planning and preparing all summer, but after enacting those plans and seeing cases spike regardless, they’ll take the coming four weeks to reevaluate and regroup in hopes of bringing students back to campus next month.

“We saw so many students on campus that were doing all the right things,” Read said. “We just really appreciate those students. This was a really hard announcement for us to make. There are so many of us who are rooting so hard for in-person instruction … We love our students. We’re proud of them, and we’re going to get through this together.”

CONTACT Charlotte Matherly at mathercg@jmu.edu. For more on the culture, arts and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Twitter and Instagram @Breeze_Culture.
First years experience altered 1787 orientation and are sent home days later

“Just because they’re going home doesn’t mean that my FROG duties are done. Just because I might not be able to do it physically, I can still do it online... I’m sure that they’re going to have even more questions.”

Taylor Durham
Shenandoah Hall FROG

By KAILEY CHENG AND RYANN SHEEHY
The Breeze

If any returning student or graduate were to imagine their 1787 Weeks of Welcome, they’d see their freshman selves eating at a crowded E-Hall for brunch, playing Rock Paper Scissors on the football field with hundreds of people or walking downtown with their First Year Orientation Guide (FROG) group for the annual block party.

But, the class of ‘24 has experienced an orientation and first week of classes like no other, and it may be memorable in its own way as the U.S. continues to battle COVID-19.

On Sept. 1, JMU administration announced that classes will temporarily move to all online Sept. 7 and that all on-campus residents return home by that date. Despite this, first-year students were still able to experience a new form of 1787 Weeks of Welcome.

Sarah Sunde, director of orientation, said she arrived at Shenandoah Hall on Monday, Aug. 24 at the last time slot to move in, which was from 4-7 p.m. Because of the longer, staggered process, FROG groups were determined by move-in time and date, Sunde said.

While the later arrival times may have felt like a disadvantage to some, others, such as FROG and junior health sciences major Taylor Durham, thought the new method of assigning 1787 groups was beneficial.

“I honestly kind of like [it] a little bit more than how it was in the past because students get to connect and meet other students that they probably wouldn’t have ever met before,” Durham said.

Peters’ first FROG activity started around 8:30-9 p.m. that evening, but she was able to have a full day’s worth of FROG activities on Tuesday and said it was the “perfect length.” She said the orientation staff did well with spreading out the FROG groups and was happy to meet people from the whole building rather than just her hall.

Peters said that even though FROG week was shorter, it still prepared her well for the first week of classes.

“I was tired after that day, but I felt like I got a lot of good information and that I was basically prepared to, like, start school at JMU,” Peters said. “My FROGs are really, really nice and very encouraging — really supportive.”

Durham, who served as a FROG for a Sunday move-in group in Shenandoah Hall, said she was so excited to meet the first years and described her short time as a FROG as the best experience of her life. However, she said she was sad that they were only able to spend time on-campus residents home, Durham said she still plans on being there for her first years, even if it’s over a Zoom call. She said she wants them to know she’s always a resource.

“Just because they’re going home doesn’t mean that my FROG duties are done,” Durham said. “Just because I might not be able to do it physically, I can still do it online... I’m sure that they’re going to have even more questions.”

Now being sent home, the class of ‘24 is starting their college careers in a way most never could’ve imagined.

“I am like, overwhelmed and sad at the same time,” Durham said. “I can’t even imagine what the first years are going through... As much as I want everyone to be here — especially my first years — I hope that we stay online because I want everyone to be safe and stay safe.”

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New diner opens and thrives during global pandemic

By JEAN LUTHER
The Breeze

Just over a month ago, Harrisonburg got a new diner downtown, Magpie. This new business had been in progress since before the pandemic hit but decided to open July 28 amid COVID-19.

Jordan Folk, a senior dietetics major, is a server and barista at Magpie and has been working there since it opened.

“The environment [at Magpie] is very upbeat and energetic but in a non-exhausting way, and it’s such an encouraging and inviting environment that we all feel so supported and really love being there,” Folk said.

Magpie has had to make tables socially distant and cannot seat as many customers as they normally would because of COVID-19, but that hasn’t stopped the community from coming to try this new breakfast diner.

Throughout COVID-19, the operating partner of Magpie, Kirsten Moore, said she’d hear things like, “restaurants will never be the same” and “people aren’t going to go out to eat like they used to,” but Moore said they just aren’t seeing that.

“We are not even doing take-out yet,” Moore said. “The kitchen is so slammed all day everyday.”

Magpie ‘comes to life’

New diner opens and thrives during global pandemic

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Adeline Hipps fills drink and food orders at the traditional diner-style bar inside Magpie. Christine Brady / The Breeze

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Some of that could be the design of the building with the open and bright dining area, as well as the patio, quality food and price point, Moore said.

“When [COVID-19] hit, we had a management staff that came and tried to figure out what to do and how we could build our brand and also be helpful to the community,” Moore said.

At the beginning of the shut down, the restaurant started a Magpie and Friends Market where there were drive-thrus and pick-ups twice a week. People could order online with different restaurants and farms that were participating and purchase fresh vegetables, milk or food from local restaurants.

Magpie also got ahead by using Eastern Mennonite High School’s kitchen to start baking and selling bread.

“This was a really nice way for us to help our vendors and our fellow restaurateurs as well as keep our name out there and be relevant,” Moore said.

Moore said the amount of space the building gave them was helpful throughout COVID-19. Magpie is a long, skinny building, so seating tables 6 feet apart isn’t challenging. It also has a large patio area as well as bar seating. Moore said it’s only missing about a quarter of its seats.

“Magpie has been such a success so quickly, and it’s so cool to see Kirsten’s vision come to life and see her face when we’re getting tons of people lining up,” Moore said.

Folk said that since COVID-19, employees’ temperatures are checked every day, and everyone monitors how they’re feeling.

She also said that it’s not common for guests to come in without masks, and that, overall, guests have worn masks and will wear it until they sit down and put it back on if they’re moving about the restaurant.

“It’s a joy to be there, and it’s so happy and fulfilling, which is something you don’t really get in a workplace ever,” Folk said.

The kitchen manager, Rachel FitzGerald, was asked to meet up with Moore to talk about a project she had in the works, and she laid out her vision of a “beautiful multi-use building with sort of an old school corner diner vibe but with modern fresh food” that has a changing seasonal menu. FitzGerald said Moore asked her to head up the kitchen side of things.

“I was really excited about the project and said yes immediately,” FitzGerald said.

FitzGerald has been training cooks and working on fresh menu items. She said she’s been working with Moore throughout the opening of the restaurant and using the COVID-19 guidelines.

“It’s been a unique and challenging time, but we’ve been amazed at the response,” FitzGerald said.

FitzGerald described the menu as having a “fluid vision.” The menu changes frequently depending on the produce available.

“It’s in a constant state of changing things up and trying to find the best food possible,” FitzGerald said.

FitzGerald said Magpie has partnered with Baker’s Farm in Mount Jackson and also works with the produce auction to get local vegetables.

Magpie works with its employees and community to fill a niche that was missing in Harrisonburg. While adhering to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines, the Magpie staff is working to make their restaurant a place where people feel comfortable to dine in during these times.

“It’s so cool to see how much people love Magpie, and, regardless of people maybe not wanting to come out of their houses or feeling weird about [COVID-19] stuff, that it’s a space they feel they can come and they are trusting us to be careful and give them good service while being safe and following guidelines,” Folk said.

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Dukes in the NFL

Former JMU players prepare for their first season in the NFL

By ANDREW OLIVEROS
The Breeze

Five former JMU football players are ready to bring their talents to the big leagues and prove they deserve a spot on their team for the 2020-21 NFL Season. These players have gone to the next step of their football careers, but they all share one thing in common: they’re Dukes.

From the East Coast to the West Coast, these former Dukes are preparing for their journey in the NFL. Wherever that journey takes them, they’ll always hold that passion and spirit they have from playing football at JMU.

Ron’Dell Carter (Defensive end, UDFA, Dallas Cowboys)

Carter was a sack and tackle machine for the Dukes. He finished his redshirt senior year with 12 sacks, the third most sacks in a JMU single-season. Carter also finished seventh nationally and second in the CAA in tackles for loss per game with 1.7 that season. These defensive accolades earned him the Phil Steele FCS National Defensive Player of the Year and CAA Defensive Player of the Year awards.

Carter’s impact on the Cowboys defense could bring a sense of depth and the explosive rush he exemplified in college. During the 2019 season, the Cowboys gave up 6.8 passing yards per play and 5.2 total yards per play. Carter can help bring more of a rush to the quarterback, which Dallas struggled with last year. The former Duke will be alongside Dallas veteran defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence and recently acquired defensive end Everson Griffen, not only to learn what it takes to play in the NFL but also prove why he should be a Cowboy.

John Daka (Outside linebacker, UDFA, Baltimore Ravens)

Daka was the sack leader for the Dukes his senior year with 16.5, breaking the JMU single-season record. He also had a knack of forcing fumbles, finishing with four and making him the fifth highest in the FCS. Daka made a name for himself on the national stage, finishing first in total sacks and tackles for loss, third for tackles for loss with 1.8 and fifth in sacks per game with 1.03.

During the 2019 season, the Ravens allowed a league-low 36.7 passer rating when pressuring opposing quarterbacks. The addition of a nation-top sacker and tackler in Daka could add more fuel to this fire.

Both Carter and Daka were key pieces to JMU’s defense. Dallas and Baltimore are always viewed by the national media as being relevant to the NFL and potential Super Bowl winners. Baltimore hasn’t been to a Super Bowl since 2013, and Dallas hasn’t since the 90s, though it’s possible that these two Dukes could be a piece of the pie to help these organizations improve on the defensive side of the football.

Ben DiNucci (Quarterback, 7th round, Dallas Cowboys)

DiNucci was the only former Duke to be drafted in the 2020 NFL Draft. He finished with the best completion percentage in the nation with a 70.9 completion rating and second nationally in pass efficiency with a passer rating of 169.5 his redshirt senior year. DiNucci ranked in the top 10 for five all-time records at JMU.

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott might be their starting quarterback for years to come, but DiNucci could take the role of backup quarterback as he battles Andy Dalton for that No. 2 quarterback spot in training camp. Dalton is a veteran quarterback with a great deal of experience from his time in Cincinnati, though he’s on life support for his job in the NFL. He didn’t satisfy the Bengals organization enough to keep him around and was released during this past offseason, and they drafted quarterback Joe Burrow out of LSU with the first pick in the 2020 NFL Draft. DiNucci is unproven but is coming off a great year at JMU and has fresh legs, while Dalton already has a foot out the door of the league.

Brandon Polk (Wide receiver, UDFA, Los Angeles Rams)

Polk only played one season for the Dukes but still put up big numbers, finishing with 1,179 yards his redshirt senior year. He scored 11 touchdowns and ranked 16th nationally in receiving touchdowns. He averaged 15.9 yards a catch and also became the holder of the second most receptions at JMU with 74.

Under the radar, Polk had the second fastest 40-yard dash out of all the players that declared for the 2020 NFL Draft. His recorded time was 4.28 seconds. He was .01 seconds behind the former Alabama and first round pick wide receiver Henry Ruggs III’s 40-yard dash time — showing the level of his speed.

Polk isn’t a veteran in the NFL quite yet, but he’s a “college veteran” as he played four years at Penn State and one year at JMU. His ability to stack up yards, the burst in his speed and his experience might just get him a spot on the Rams. Los Angeles’ top wide receivers, Robert Woods and Cooper Kupp, dealt with the injury bug last year, and there’s always a chance it might bite them again. The Rams organization also parted ways with wide receiver Brandin Cooks through a trade this offseason. He was one of their former key weapons. These events that transpired could open a competition at the wide receiver position that’s up for grabs for Polk.

Dylan Stapleton (Tight end, UDFA, Houston Texans)

Stapleton became a part of JMU’s football program as a junior after he transferred from a Division II college football program at Slippery Rock University. The 6-foot-5, 242-pound tight end had 35 receptions for 426 yards his senior year for the Dukes and was on the Second All-CAA team for tight ends. He showed up on the big stage at the FCS National Championship Game against North Dakota State with six receptions for 66 yards, that being his highest yards total for that season.

The Texans’ tight end talent doesn’t seem to have much talent or depth, as the only big-name tight end they have is Ryan Griffin. Stapleton’s size and length could give him a chance to make an impact on the tight end position in Houston with an advantage over smaller defenders while receiving and blocking.

Even as COVID-19 continues, the NFL is still on schedule with its 2020-21 season. These former JMU players will need to show out even more during training camp because rookies who are drafted in later rounds or undrafted free agents usually get to show their talents on the field during the preseason games too. This year that won’t be a reality because all preseason games were canceled. These former Dukes look to make their roster and make an impact on the field for their team this season.

CONTACT Andrew Oliveros at oliverab@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter at @TheBreezeSports.

Brandon Polk reached the NFL after transferring to JMU from Penn State. Breeze file photo

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SUMMER BALL ROUND-UP

JMU baseball players compete in various leagues during offseason

By MADISON HRICIK
The Breeze

Despite COVID-19, JMU baseball team members participated in the Rockingham County Baseball League (RCBL) throughout the summer. Placed on multiple different teams, the Dukes were able to play after having only 16 games in the spring season.

Following the closing of the 2020 spring season, players and coaches were unsure of what was next. Many players looked to the RCBL as a potential option, especially after the Valley Baseball League canceled its season in April.

"It was definitely a weird gap of time," senior pitcher Justin Showalter said. "There wasn't much going on, but I think I attacked it and took advantage of that time to get better in any way I could. That was really all that was there, was to keep working, throwing and waiting for what was coming next."

A total of eight players from the JMU roster chose to compete in the RCBL, which wrapped up its season on Aug. 25. Four of the eight competed on the same team — the Broadway Bruins — and won the championship. The team won in a four-game sweep during a best-of-seven series against the New Market Shockers, marking the team's first championship since 1938.

Many players choose to participate in summer baseball leagues for a variety of reasons. Some play to gain experience prior to their collegiate debut, others play to perfect their craft before the new season and many choose to play as a means of preparation in becoming a potential draft pick for the MLB. However, players will agree that summer baseball is mostly about being able to enjoy playing in a different and unique atmosphere.

"I was looking to have fun," sophomore outfielder Chase DeLauter said. "Of course I worked on my swing and becoming more consistent, but for me this summer was about having fun."

DeLauter was named the Most Valuable Player following the Bruins’ win, once again making a name for himself in Harrisonburg. The sophomore standout has been consistent with his performance since his first game as a Duke back in February. Holding a .545 batting average during the summer, DeLauter had 36 hits, 39 RBIs and 13 home runs.

"It makes me feel like I can just go and have fun and play in college like I did with the Bruins," DeLauter said. "We saw some really good arms in the RCBL, so it makes me feel like I can hit well in college this spring as well."

Showalter also took part in the RCBL, this summer and pitched for the Bridgewater Reds. He had 14 strikeouts in 14 innings played, holding an ERA of 2.57. The Reds finished fifth in the league this year with a record of 11-10.

"It was good to continue getting more innings and keep playing," Showalter said. "I got to develop my third and fourth pitches that I don’t use as often in collegiate play, so hopefully that'll show to be beneficial going into the spring."

Senior pitcher Nick Stewart didn’t participate in the RCBL but instead joined a new summer league located in Loudoun County, Virginia. The standout pitcher was slated to be drafted to MLB prior to the pandemic, but the league chose to shorten the draft this year to match the shortened season and limited rosters.

"After the draft got shortened, I just started training to go back to JMU the next year, and it started with summer ball," Stewart said. "Then, I just started focusing on coming back next season."

Stewart was one of many collegiate baseball players in the Northern Virginia area to sign up for the Loudoun County league. The league was created this past summer and had over 300 players involved.

Many players originally from the Loudoun County area are often committed to play in major baseball teams such as Louisville, University of Tennessee and University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. These players can also be former teammates from travel and high school teams, giving way for unique rivalries that aren’t seen during the collegiate season.

"I chose to stay in my hometown mainly because the competition was a little better there rather than in the RCBL," Stewart said. "And it gave me a chance to be with my family longer."

Now, with the team back on campus and the summer leagues over, the Diamond Dukes are beginning their own training for the fall season. Without a fall game or season to play, the team is practicing and preparing the newest teammates as well as continuing to work on skills the RCBL has given them.

"I just want to keep getting better every day. With the years of work I’ve put into this, it’s exciting to see it all come together and see how far that’ll take me."

JMU senior pitcher Justin Showalter

"It’s about surrounding yourself with your teammates to get better and improve," Stewart said. "We want to get better and so we surround ourselves with teammates who can push us like a coach can and training harder than I would without everything going on."

The 2021 season schedule has yet to be released, but the NCAA has yet to make a decision on athletics for winter and spring sports.

CONTACT Madison Hricik at hricikmn@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter at @TheBreezeSports.
Opinion: JMU football shouldn’t attempt to play a spring season

By COURTNEY RYDER
The Breeze

JMU postponed all of its fall sports, including football, because of continuing safety risks posed by COVID-19. Athletes and students alike were disappointed with the news; football is arguably the best part of the fall semester. It brings the JMU and Harrisonburg community together.

Because of how unpredictable COVID-19 has proven to be, JMU shouldn’t try to have a football season in spring 2021. JMU’s priority is keeping its community safe and healthy and rushing the return of sports would jeopardize that goal.

The absence of football will be noticeable on campus this fall. There’ll be no buzzing fans tailgating in the Godwin parking lot before a game, and there’ll be silence instead of the sound of the Marching Royal Dukes and a cheering student section so loud it’s heard from almost anywhere on campus. Combined with the rules in place to ensure social distancing is followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the fall semester will feel different from years past.

When news broke that the football season would be postponed, rumors began to circulate about the possibility of a spring season, which some people felt was a better option than no football at all. The idea that it’ll be safe for a football season in a few months, while it’s still unsafe now, is unrealistic and foolish and shouldn’t be considered.

JMU Athletics has stayed pretty quiet on the subject. When Jeff Bourne, director of athletics, announced the suspension of fall sports, he said that JMU “will be part of active exploration with national and conference peers regarding the ability to sponsor fall sport championship opportunities in the spring semester.”

A decision to proceed with a spring season likely won’t be made until the early winter because of the uncertainty of the pandemic and the hard work and planning required to make a season happen. One thing that would require significant time and planning is the schedule, which is bigger than JMU and involves collaboration with the CAA and NCAA.

Football should wait for the fall 2021 season to resume. It’ll be nearly impossible to plan a spring season for such a big series as far in advance as would be required. When the pandemic began in early March, many people believed it’d be gone before the beginning of summer.
CORONA CRISIS

SPORTS

When that wasn’t the case, many people thought for sure it’d be gone and everything would be back to normal by the time students returned to campus.

As the pandemic and the university’s response continues to be fluid situation, it seems useless to try to plan such a huge event like a football season months in advance when it’s unclear what the pandemic’s conditions will look like in the spring. As of Sept. 1, JMU had 528 positive cases, the highest number of cases of any college in Virginia. Having to consider not only JMU’s case numbers but the numbers of every school that would potentially be an opponent makes it difficult, if not impossible, to create a schedule.

The football team has the largest roster of any sort at JMU and is a reflection of the JMU community. As such, it should set an example by practicing safe social distancing — including no games or full team practices — and wearing masks or other personal protective equipment. Based on current guidelines for group gatherings, there doesn’t seem to be much hope that a sport like football will be able to safely return anytime soon.

There could also be financial implications of a spring football season. Although football is a large source of revenue for the university, it could be more costly to try to complete a season in the spring. It’s likely that weekly testing will still be necessary in the spring, which is a huge expense for the large roster.

There’s more to JMU sports than football, and if sports are back to normal by spring, those sports should be allowed to have time to shine. Lacrosse, tennis, golf, baseball and softball deserve the full support of JMU Athletics without having to worry if a spring football season will have an impact on schedules or availability of resources such as athletic trainers, tutors or other staff members.

Fall in Harrisonburg without JMU football doesn’t seem right, but unfortunately it’s the new reality. It’s not safe for the players and coaching staff, and it’s not safe for the community.

COVID-19 has caused numerous changes at JMU over the past six months, and it’ll continue to do so as students begin the fall semester. Considering how the pandemic has progressed thus far, it’s hard to imagine collegiate sports resuming this spring; if they do, JMU football should sit out a possible spring season and focus on coming back stronger and better to dominate its fall 2021 season and become CAA champions again.

CONTACT Courtney Ryder at Contact Courtney Ryder at ryderce@dukes.jmu.edu. For more sports coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
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19 From then on  
20 Jousting garb  
22 Hunk of soap  
24 Slander  
25 Starving  
29 Encountered  
30 Bullwinkle's foe

31 Greek vowel  
32 Ran through, in a sense  
34 Unclear image  
35 Black  
36 Exhausted  
37 Fragment  
40 Mediocre  
41 Actress Gilpin  
42 Noble  
46 "-- go braghi!"  
47 Sandwich treat  
48 Science room  
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2 Shock and —  
3 Pen pal?  
4 Old number?  
5 Blunder  
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7 "Of course"  
8 Victoria's  
9 Any time now  
10 Idle or

30 Salamander  
31 List-condensing abbr.  
32 Clapton  
33 Social engagement  
34 Friend of Dorothy  
35 Vail gear  
36 Charitable donations  
37 Stench  
38 Mariah or  
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49 Spill the beans  
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51 Friend of Dorothy  
52 Friend of Dorothy  
53 Friend of Dorothy

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 3x3 box contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆◆◆◆

◆ Moderate  ◆◆ Challenging
◆◆◆◆ HOO BOY!

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The beginning of JMU football

2004: The year of optimism

Dukes defeat Turkeys

The Mike Houston era

The Curt Cignetti era
A PROGRAM IS BORN

Ron Carrier and Challace McMillin spearhead the formation of Madison College’s newest sport

By NOAH ZIEGLER
The Breeze

At first, it wasn’t JMU football. There wasn’t Bridgeforth Stadium, there weren’t streamers ready to be launched after each score and there weren’t the high expectations surrounding the program seen today. Instead, there was a vision.

In 1972 — five years after Madison College became co-educational — then-Madison College president Ronald Carrier sought to create a football program to further the school’s image and shift away from its reputation as an all-women’s teacher college. It was a difficult task but one that would add to Carrier’s legacy, which is still seen on campus.

When Madison decided to begin its football program, it was on short notice. Head coach Challace McMillin had just over two months to form a team. He was creative with his recruiting; from sending letters to incoming male students to weaving through class registration lines at Godwin Hall, McMillin’s task of putting together a formidable team was nothing short of difficult.

“I put the forces into place,” Carrier said to JMU during the university’s Centennial Celebration. “The activities, the events, the new courses — that would change the attitude of people and show them that this was truly a coeducational institution.”

McMillin was able to assemble 60 interested players for his first team meeting. He was forward with them, telling them that football is a physical sport that requires a high level of mental toughness. Following the meeting, players proved to be an arduous task.

“When you have somebody that has this long, storied career of excellence and passion for the program that you’re involved with, that gives you a feeling of confidence,” former kicker Joe Showker (’79) said. “It connects you with the years gone by, and it strengthens the whole player experience.”

As the countdown to the program kick off dwindled, the schedule was only five games: Shepherd College junior varsity, Hampden-Sydney College junior varsity, Fork Union Military Academy and Hargrave Military Academy.

On Oct. 6, 1972, one day before the Dukes’ opening game against Shepherd that was supposed to be at Harrisonburg High School, rain poured in Harrisonburg, making the DHS field susceptible to damage if football were to be played on it. DHS officials notified Madison College’s Dean Ehlers to damage if football were to be played on it. DHS officials notified Madison College’s Dean Ehlers — the athletic director at the time — that they wouldn’t allow Madison to use the field.

Once again, McMillin had to improvise.

With the help of many, a football field was created near Godwin in less than a day. The team, coaches and administration were eager to see the birth of a program and nothing would prevent that.

The first season of any program is likely going to be difficult, and that sentiment didn’t evade the Dukes. McMillin opened with a 6-0 loss and would go on to fail to score a single point the rest of the season. However, not all was gloom because the Dukes earned their first win in program history against Anne Arundel Community College in a commanding 34-8 fashion. This season saw much improvement with the team finishing 4-5, and then in 1974, the program saw its first winning season as the Dukes ended at 6-4.

“[McMillin] attracted good coaches with him,” Showker said. “Challace was the first coach I ever had that gave an itinerary for away trips. He gave us goal cards where we wrote out our goals. He was very much in the sport psychology and the mental side of sport and was highly organized. Because of that, his programs then were stellar.”

Then, in 1975, McMillin brought an undefeated season and the first trophy. The Dukes defeated Shippensburg State 14-3 to win the Virginia Collegiate Athletic Association title, capping off a 9-0-1 season that signified the rapid growth of Madison College football.

McMillin would go on to coach the team through the 1984 season, finishing with an overall record of 67-60-2. During his time, the university shifted from Madison College to James Madison University and made the jump from Division III to Division-I AA as an Independent school.

“[McMillin] was such a gentleman and a well-spoken man that he commanded respect,” Showker said. “Everyone knew that his heart was totally purple. He was the defining example of bleeding purple. He loved JMU and he loved being out there at practice.”

Joe Purzycki was chosen to be McMillin’s successor in 1985. He brought a resume that included being the first white head coach at a historically black university (Delaware State). He would lead JMU to its first ever playoff appearance in 1987. While the Dukes fell in the first round to Marshall 41-12, it was a milestone in the program that had been grasping for tangible success, but it still remained in a lower regard than the school’s basketball team.

“When I got there, the perception was that basketball was much more engaging with the students than football was,” former student Mike Schwall (’89) said. “It wasn’t much of, ‘We gotta go to the game this week,’ as I’m sure it is now. Back then, it was something to do on a Saturday afternoon.”

The next three seasons ended with five wins each, but JMU wasn’t able to find itself in the playoffs. Purzycki finished his tenure with the Dukes at 34-30-2, which would be his last coaching job. The following eight years would be held by a pair of four-year stints from former head coaches Rip Scherer (1991-94) and Alex Wood (1995-98).

In Sherer’s first year at the helm, he led JMU to its second playoff appearance and first postseason win. After finishing the regular season 8-3 — which included wins over four programs that are now FBS schools — the Dukes traveled to Newark, Delaware, where they escaped with a 42-35 win in double overtime. Unfortunately for JMU, it fell 24-21 a week later at home to Samford, which would go on to that year’s semifinals. After going 4-7 in 1992, the Dukes joined the Yankee Conference in 1993. Their first season ended 6-3 with no playoff appearance, but JMU found itself in the playoffs again in 1994. Sherer led the team to another playoff victory, this time against Troy State. However, once again he couldn’t get past the second round as JMU fell to Marshall, 28-21, in overtime.

Wood found success in his first season as JMU went to the playoffs for a second straight year, but fell in the first round to Appalachian State. This was the pinnacle of his stint at JMU before joining the Minnesota Vikings as a quarterbacks coach, and thus the Mickey Matthews era began.

“Everyone knew that his heart was totally purple. He was the defining example of bleeding purple. He loved JMU and he loved being out there at practice.”

Joe Showker (’79) on Challace McMillin
While the Dukes weren’t competing for national championships just yet, that didn’t prevent numerous players from competing at the next level. Former wide receiver Gary Clark (‘84) was picked up by the then-Washington Redskins and in his rookie season in 1985 he excelled, garnering 926 yards, five touchdowns and 72 receptions.

Clark ended his career with two Super Bowl rings, four Pro Bowl appearances, was a three-time All-Pro and was named to the Redskins’ Ring of Fame. He’s also the first person in JMU history to have his jersey retired.

The next player drafted from JMU is one of the most decorated NFL players in history. Former linebacker/defensive end Charles Haley finished his time with the Dukes with 506 tackles, 17 sacks and three interceptions. He was selected in the fourth round of the 1986 NFL Draft by the San Francisco 49ers and was named to the NFL All-Rookie team.

Haley would go on to win the Super Bowl with Dallas in 1993, 1994 and 1996, becoming one of two players all-time to win five total Super Bowls. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2011 and the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2015.

Seven other athletes from 1987-97 competed in the NFL, baring the Dukes’ brand into the professional scene. This set the stage for numerous future JMU stars to make names for themselves at the next level — names that paved the way for the growth of the Dukes’ brand.

“IT fills you with pride,” Schwall said. “I’ve been in a fantasy football league for over 30 years now, same group of guys, and every single one of them know and know very well where I went to school.

I love bragging about it. I love showing it off.”

CONTACT Noah Ziegler at breezesports@gmail.com. For more football coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
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The Dukes win the 2004 I-AA Football Championship despite adversity

By SAVANNAH REGER
The Breeze

In 2001, JMU football was a laughing stock. Head coach Mickey Matthews was in his second year of his coaching stint at JMU, and the Dukes were young and inexperienced. The team went 2-9 that season and the young JMU team had nothing to do but grow.

That’s exactly what it did. In 2002, the Dukes improved to 5-7, with a 3-6 conference record; in 2003 they improved to 6-6, breaking the .500 win percentage for the first time since 2000 where the Dukes went 6-5.

However, heading into the 2004 season, nobody would have picked the Dukes to win it all. They were the underdogs.

“Going into the season, I think we all felt we had a shot at being pretty good,” former JMU 2004 team member Bruce Johnson said. “As the season progressed, that feeling became a little bit more tangible. It was pretty cool to see and feel that feeling become a little bit more.

At the beginning of the 2004 season, the national championship was the last thought on the team’s mind. It wasn’t because of its past records, though. It was because of Matthews’ son, Clayton, and the accident that left him paralyzed for life.

It was bigger than football. Clayton played on the team and was a part of the culture Mickey Matthews brought to the Dukes. However, the accident that happened on campus changed Clayton and the life of Matthews forever, and the Dukes rallied around the Matthews family.

“For Mickey, the family story, you can’t set that aside,” JMU Director of Broadcast Services Curt Dudley said. “It was not an easy rehabilitation, so there was that underlying story behind it all, and the fans certainly knew it. It’s like some adversity you get to know. You come together in a certain way and it’s interesting how those types of human moments come to motivate an athlete.”

So, with heavy hearts for Clayton, JMU football went out to play in his honor. The Dukes didn’t expect to accomplish what they did, but then again, who doesn’t root for the underdog?

The Dukes started the 2004 season with two wins, one dominating, one not so dominating. It was both the offense and defensive working together this season, though, that led the Dukes to their stunning record. JMU won its home opener against Lock Haven 62-7 and then won its first road game at Villanova 17-0.

“We had seniors that had been through two losing seasons and we knew we could be much better than we had been,” JMU former 2004 team member Marvin Brown said. “We had a head coach who was on the ‘hot seat’ as the last game in 2003 [there was] a huge ‘Fire Mickey’ chant by the crowd, so I think all of that created a perfect storm of a team ready to take on everybody.”

The Dukes didn’t lose much in 2004. They were playing for a cause and it was one of those years where everything just clicked. In Week 3 they had one of their only losses to West Virginia, 45-10.

However, the Dukes got a boost after the humiliating loss in Morgantown. The next six games were all JMU as the Dukes rattled off six consecutive wins to bring their record to 8-1 on the year.

“I think we all felt that there wasn’t a team in 1-AA that should beat us,” Johnson said. “I think that approach helped to keep us focused, because our conference was tough, and any given Saturday a game could go one way or the other if you weren’t on your game.”

Within those six games were some moments that JMU fans will remember. The Dukes beat in-state rival Richmond 26-20 on the road, the second time in a row that JMU beat the Spiders. They also dominated at home against the University of Massachusetts, 28-7 and Virginia Military 48-10.

Another game that will go down in history during the JMU championship run is the team’s game against Delaware. The Dukes and the Blue Hens played a defensive and back and forth game. The score was tied in Harrisonburg and it looked like it was heading toward overtime. Then, senior corner back Cortez Thompson ran the punt back 87 yards to secure a win for JMU — and there were no flags on the play.

“It was one of the best calls in JMU football,” Dudley said. “A lot of fans that were at that game remember that call, the ‘no flag’ call.”

JMU rode the win streak until they hit in-state rivals William & Mary. The Dukes were No. 4 at the time and the Tribe were No. 10. In a stunning game for James Madison, the Dukes lost 27-24 as William & Mary kicked a last second field goal to win.

“Looking back, maybe the last second loss to William & Mary was a good thing,” JMU alumni and Bridgewater resident Michael Ruckman said. “So even though we lost, it might have been a good loss, if you can say such a thing. I think it made a run in the playoffs more of [an] ‘us against the world’ with our seeding.”

see 2004, page 8

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The Dukes faced No.7 Montana in the first round. "It was amazing. " Brown said. "To win a National Title after playing every playoff game on the road was a time I'd never forget. Those that came before us paved the way, but what JMU football is now, we felt that 2004 was the beginning of the era [of] JMU being a nationally recognized powerhouse."

The Dukes came off a 6-6 season and the freshmen that dared the 2-9 year got to hold the trophy up first. JMU won its first I-AA championship in program history, a league that would later change to the FCS, and JMU fans wouldn't feel the glory again until 2016.

JMU played for Clayton. The Dukes played for their spirit and culture, and they played to represent James Madison University.

CONTACT Savannah Reger at breezesports@gmail.com. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
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JMU Football over the years

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1972

Don Becker runs the ball in one of JMU's first football games. Breeze file photo

2017

ESPN wraps taping by unanimously picking the Dukes to beat Villanova. Breeze file photo

2019

Former QB Ben DiNucci yells in frustration at the National Championship. Breeze file photo

1972

Former university president Ronald Carrier throws the football around. Breeze file photo
JMU Players celebrate after winning the National Championship in 2016. Breeze file photo

Everett Withers, former head coach, celebrates a win against Richmond. Breeze file photo

A former JMU Football player celebrates a touchdown at Virginia Tech. Breeze file photo

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Halftime

JMU Football Between Championships

BY SAVANNAH REGER
The Breeze

Harrisonburg celebrated in 2004. The Dukes won the I-AA National Championship for the first time in program history. After 2004, JMU fell to the middle of the pack and it watched other Atlantic 10 rivals win the championship. The Dukes were inconsistent at times, and the coaching staff was questioned.

Head coach Mickey Matthews wasn’t done yet, though. While Matthews didn’t bring another championship back to JMU, years later he gave the university something that many argue was more valuable than a trophy.

On Sept. 11, 2010, JMU defeated Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, 21-16. "It was a perfect storm situation," JMU Director of Broadcast Services Curt Dudley said. "We got a big play in that game, we got a fumble recovery. It all worked out well."

This wasn’t just any win. Virginia Tech, which plays in the ACC, was coming off an 0-1 start with a loss to Boise State the previous Monday and thought it was prepared to take on the FCS Dukes. The Hokies were ranked No. 13 nationally and were stunned by JMU at home.

Led by senior quarterback Drew Dudzik, the Dukes halted the Hokies and brought a win home to Harrisonburg that Matthews called "the biggest win in my professional career."

After the two-hour drive down Interstate 81 to Blacksburg, JMU collected $400,000 in the upset and became the second FCS team ever to defeat a ranked FBS team. The first was Appalachian State in 2007 against Michigan.

"I remember saying [on the broadcast] that right now we are getting a lot of attention around the country," Dudley said. "As people saw [on the ticker] JMU 21, Virginia Tech 16, we [were] getting a lot of exposure."

Fans celebrated. People drove around with custom license plates commemorating the win, custom shirts were made, the fan base grew and JMU became a bigger name on the college football map. People argued about which success was bigger, the Dukes winning the 2004 National Championship or beating in-state rival Virginia Tech.

For Matthews, both were accomplishments. He brought the first football championship to JMU and defeated the Hokies. The Dukes had previously beaten Virginia in 1982 and Navy in 1989 and 1990.

"As a Division I program, they were probably taking the Dukes for granted," Dudley said. "It did create that debate, the 'Which is bigger, the championship or the Virginia Tech game?'"

Matthews coached the Dukes from 1999 to 2013. JMU ran a heavy, powerful offense and with him as coach, JMU grew to be a known name. The Dukes started making headlines, growing as a team and became a national name.

"I remember Coach Matthews was always spoken of with such high regard by everyone in the JMU and Harrisonburg communities," former JMU Student Athletic Trainer Andrew Russo said. "If he was out at the grocery store, people always interacted with him and he talked with them about football and JMU."

After Matthews left in 2013, JMU was searching for a new coach for the first time in 14 years. During the last few years under Matthews the team was in a progressive decline. Most JMU fans describe the Virginia Tech win as Matthews' last major accomplishment. JMU made the playoffs in 2011, but missed in 2012 and 2013.

On Dec. 20, 2013, Everett Withers was hired as the next head football coach. Withers served as head coach at the University of North Carolina in 2011 and a defensive coordinator for Ohio State from 2012-13. He came to JMU with a new offensive energy and a younger look for the program, something fans were excited about.

"2013 was a rough ride," alumni and season ticket holder Michael Evangelista said. "We just went 6-6 and two years removed from a $50 million plus stadium renovation, attendance dragged, we were running the ball on third and long and the fan base had enough. We needed someone that understood the CFB landscape, 'modern' recruiting, how to engage fans of all ages and how to reignite a program — Withers was exactly that."

Withers stayed with the team for only two seasons, but the two years he was head coach of the Dukes were historic. With the help of quarterback Vad Lee, Withers led JMU back to the FCS playoffs in both years, and into the FCS top 10.

In 2014, JMU went 9-4 (6-2 CAA) with the partnership of Withers and Lee. The Dukes averaged 36.9 points per game offensively, but slipped on the defense side and gave up about 29.3 points per game. Fans often thought the team had to score at least 35 points to stay in the game.

"I think Coach Withers brought a lot of energy and really put JMU football on a national stage," Russo said. "He expected a lot from the team and wanted each player to be at their best. Practice was always up-tempo, and that translated to how we played on the field those few years we had Coach Withers."

However, the team's best was something the Dukes were capable of under Withers. Lee broke JMU records during his time in Harrisonburg. He was a two-time — and the first back-to-back winner — of the Bill Dudley award, which goes to the state's best Division I player. He tied JMU's all-time passing touchdown record at 51, and is a three-time All American. Lee also has JMU's single-season records for total passing yards, touchdown passes, passing yards and total offense.

The Dukes fell in 2014 to Liberty 26-21 at home in the first round of the FCS Playoffs. However, fans had lots of hope for the season to come, as both Withers and Lee returned for the 2015 season.

"Vad Lee was a dream," Evangelista said. "He had a great personality, amazing skills and brought stability to a team that had a history of off-the field issues, particularly at the quarterback position. He helped build JMU as a brand — we were going to play exciting football, win a lot of games while being engaged in the community."

JMU started the 2015 season ranked No. 12 in the polls, but after quick wins over Morehead State, Lehigh and Albany, the Dukes rose to No. 9. After their 48-45 upset win against SMU, in which Lee had a career-setting game, the Dukes jumped even higher to No. 6, and then after another victory, to No. 5.

JMU stayed at No. 5 for two weeks until it moved to the No. 4 seed. The Dukes were still giving up major points on defense, but their offense made up for it, averaging 48.7 points per game.

In Week 8 of the season, JMU finally faced a real FCS test — none other than in-state rival Richmond.

The Spiders were No. 11 and rising when they came to Harrisonburg, but Richmond coming into town wasn't the only major event happening at JMU that week.

ESPN's College GameDay came to Harrisonburg for Richmond week, and it had the entire campus buzzing. Students slept outside the night before to get good spots, the Quad fuzled with alumni and there seemed to not be enough purple and gold streamers to go around.

"We had a uniform rebrand, the locker room was renovated and updated, and College GameDay made their first appearance on campus," Russo said. "All of those events were huge moments in JMU football history that really put us in the front of people's minds — having millions of people tune in to ESPN on a Saturday morning. People definitely knew who we were after that."

People made signs to get on TV, the College GameDay crew loved the JMU atmosphere and football analyst Lee Corso even walked out of Wilson Hall dressed as James Madison to pick the Dukes as the game's winners. It was a day everyone would remember and the game hadn't even begun.

However, the game didn't go in JMU's favor. The Dukes kept up with Richmond for three quarters of a game, but former Richmond quarterback Kyle Lauletta did his homework and knew how to get past the Dukes' defense. In the fourth quarter, Lee was injured and sophomore quarterback Bryan Schor came in to finish the game.

To finish the story, go online to breezewmu.org.

CONTACT Savannah Reger at breezesports@breezejmu.org. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
Mike Houston leads the Dukes to their second national title, becomes most successful coach in three seasons

By NOAH ZIEGLER
The Breeze

Following former JMU football head coach Everett Withers’ departure it was clear the Dukes were on the cusp of becoming a perennial contender, making it more important for JMU director of athletics Jeff Bourne to make the right hire.

When Bourne chose Mike Houston as JMU’s football coach, Bourne wanted to find someone that was a perfect fit. Not only was it important for the Dukes to embrace the university, but the Harrisonburg community as well.

Houston’s coaching career began at the high school level in North Carolina, where he served as the defensive coordinator at Forbush (East Bend, NC) and T.C. Roberson (Asheville, NC). He earned his first college opportunity at Division II Brevard College as defensive coordinator before being hired to the same position at Lenoir-Rhyne.

He coached the Bears’ defense from 2007-10, where he quickly established a hard-nosed defense that ranked high in multiple categories. In 2011, he was promoted to head coach. His first season saw Lenoir-Rhyne bring SEC experience as he spent three years at South Carolina before transferring to JMU.

It was clear early on that Houston had a championship mentality. He was hired by The Citadel in 2014. In his second season he led the Bulldogs to their first conference title since 1992, catching the eye of many — including Bourne.

Houston had an important task when hired by JMU. Former quarterback Vad Lee was graduating and the team needed to be replaced. Houston had two primary candidates: Bryan Schor and Connor Mitch. Schor was a rising junior at the time and had played significant minutes in 2015 after Lee suffered a season-ending injury while playing against Richmond over a month before the playoffs. Mitch, on the other hand, brought SEC experience as he spent three years at South Carolina before transferring to JMU.

Schor won the job, allowing Houston to craft the Milford, Pennsylvania, native into the perfect candidate for Houston’s spread offense.

The first task on Houston’s 2016 slate was Morehead State. The amount of firepower held by the offense quickly became evident as JMU notched 28 points in the first quarter via touchdown runs from former running backs Khalid Abdullah and Cardon Johnson, both South Carolina. The Dukes would go on to win 80-7, setting the program record for points in a single game.

After another impressive offensive showing against Central Connecticut State the following week, the Dukes traveled to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to take on former UNC quarterback Mitchell Trubisky and the Tar Heels.

“I think any player who’s played for Coach Houston can tell you no matter the circumstance, the stipulations, whether the team is ranked No. 1, not ranked, in the playoffs or not, it’s full throttle all the time,” former offensive lineman Mac Patrick said. “Our coaches were great … With Coach Houston, it was never a problem of we’re taking a team lightly — we took everyone serious.”

On the first drive of the game, JMU marched 82 yards to take a 7-0 lead. The two teams went back and forth for the remainder of the first quarter, but after the first 15 minutes it was the Dukes that led, 21-14. But, the momentum quickly shifted as UNC scored 28 unanswered points to take control and win the game.

Trubisky finished 24-of-27 with 432 yards and three touchdowns and would eventually be chosen second overall in the 2017 NFL Draft. That didn’t change anything for Houston. Despite facing a larger program with high caliber NFL talent, he expected JMU to leave Kenan Memorial Stadium with a win. This was the mentality Houston brought to the table and served to be a critical moment in the season.

“When JMU lost to North Carolina 56-28, Coach Houston was mad,” Thomas said. “He was mad that they didn’t win the football game. That got his team’s attention. The following week in practice was different; there was a different tone about it, there was a different feel, even though they were doing the exact same things, it had a different meaning to it.”

The following week the Dukes traveled to take on Maine. After taking a 10-6 lead, the Black Bears stormed 75 yards on five plays to take a 13-10 lead into halftime. With two quarters to play, JMU needed to snatch momentum to avoid dropping its second game.

Less than two minutes into the third quarter, Abdullah took off for 85 yards to reclaim the lead. JMU would score again shortly after, a touchdown pass from Schor and a 52-yard scamper from Johnson solidified a victory for the Dukes.

Following Maine was a commanding 43-20 win over Delaware and a 31-24 triumph over Villanova and 63-14 blowout of Elon later, with a high-powered Sam Houston State team. As JMU ran away 55-22, setting up a showdown with the perfect candidate for Houston’s spread offense.

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With over seven minutes remaining in the game, the Dukes held a 42-12 lead. It seemed done and dusted, but the Wildcats scored four touchdowns in 6:46 to make it 42-39 with 1:15 left in the contest. Their comeback effort stopped there once JMU recovered an onside kick, avoiding a memorable meltdown.

The offense was clicking, but the near collapse against UNH showed the defense needed to be staunch. Then-defensive coordinator Bob Trott made necessary adjustments and for what would be the remaining eight games, the Dukes gave up more than 20 points twice.

“We just found a way to come out with a victory that game,” former safety Adam Schur said. “I think after that, we knew that we could really win any game. No matter what the situation was, Houston was going to have an answer for something.”

JMU followed the New Hampshire win by breaking the record it set against Morehead State. This time, Rhode Island fell victim to the Dukes’ potent offense, as JMU ran away 84-7. A thrilling 47-43 win over Richmond, 20-7 victory over Villanova and 63-14 blowout of Elon later, JMU wrapped up the regular season as CAA champions with an 10-1 (6-0 CAA) record, earning the No. 4 seed in the 2016 FCS Playoffs.

The road to Frisco wasn’t going to be easy. After New Hampshire defeated Lehigh in the first round of the playoffs, it set up a rematch that UNH head coach Sean McDonnell was hoping for. However, revenge wasn’t on the cards as JMU ran away 55-22, setting up a showdown with a high-powered Sam Houston State team.

Broadcast on ESPNNU, Bridgeforth Stadium was in the national spotlight once again in what was supposed to be a battle to remember. It quickly turned into a night to forget for the visiting Bearcats, and one that Dukes fans think about fondly.

Behind Trai Sharp’s 144 rushing yards and two touchdowns, Abdullah’s 141 yards on the ground and three touchdowns and the relentless defense, JMU sent a clear message to the remaining teams in the playoffs. That message came in the form of defeating the No. 5 team in the CFS, 65-7.

With the Dukes riding high off a statement win, the battles were going to get more difficult. The next task was traveling to Fargo, North Dakota, to take on the FCS behemoth North Dakota State.

“No one in the country was going to want to play us,” former safety Adam Schur said. “They weren’t anything that we weren’t prepared for or weren’t able to adjust to. I think we were one of the best teams in history to be able to adjust to gameplans in the middle of the game. I think it really showed when we played North Dakota State.”

The Bison had won five consecutive national championships and were led by former quarterback Easton Stick. Many knew the talent JMU possessed, but Houston made sure his team was ready. It wasn’t a game; it was a business trip.

The Dukes took care of business in the first half as they raced out to a 17-0 lead. NDSU scored before the half but the country began to take notice that the Bison dynasty was potentially getting derailed.
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Thursday, September 3, 2020

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Being down 17 at home didn’t faze NDSU. It scored 17 unanswered to level the score before the end of the third, meaning the fourth quarter was set to be one for the history books. With under 12 minutes remaining, former kicker Tyler Gray hit a career-long 45-yard field goal to give the Dukes an edge. Four minutes later, Schor found former wide receiver John Miller together and JMU finished the job, winning 27-17 and setting up a date with Youngstown State in the 2016 FCS National Championship — just the second time JMU had reached the title game in program history.

It seemed like destiny that Houston would lift the national title trophy. Defeating the best program in the FCS was a monumental task, and all that was left was to defeat the Wildcats.

It took the Dukes 39 seconds into their first possession to score, eventually leading to a 21-0 margin. YSU scored to make it 21-7, proving too much for Youngstown State to come back. JMU was crowned FCS National Champions for a second time, winning 27-17.

The upset of the decade was coming. Houston knew how to get his team ready for intense games and against the Jackrabbits, the Dukes were more than prepared, beating them 51-16 and forcing 10 turnovers. This sent them to Frisco once again, but NDSU was waiting for them — and it wanted revenge.

Houston’s second time in Frisco didn’t go as planned. The offense stalled and the Bison had a difficult time holding on as planned. The offense stalled and the Bison pulled within four points and had the ball late in the fourth, it couldn’t muster enough luck to earn a third national title, falling to NDSU, 17-13.

Next season wasn’t like the first two seasons under Houston. After dropping its first game to North Carolina State 24-13, JMU won four straight. Then, it was upset four straight. However, a late drive during the dying embers of the game set up current redshirt senior kicker Ethan Ratke to attempt a 46-yard field goal to send the home team to the semifinals. On a cold Virginia night, the ball sailed through the air and snuck in between the goal posts, sending fans into pandemonium.

A semifinal matchup with South Dakota State was in the cards, but it was a similar story as before: Houston knew how to get his team ready for intense games and against the Jackrabbits, the Dukes were more than prepared, beating them 51-16 and forcing 10 turnovers. This sent them to Frisco once again, but NDSU was waiting for them — and it wanted revenge.

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Mike Houston leaving for ECU left a weird feeling among JMU nation. Its beloved coach moved to the FBS level, but with a roster filled with talent, Houston’s replacement needed to be able to begin in stride.

Names like current Florida Atlantic co-offensive coordinator Drew Mehringer and Chicago Bears quarterbacks coach John DeFilippo floated around, but eventually JMU director of athletics Jeff Bourne picked Curt Cignetti to take the reins of one of the premiere FCS programs.

Cignetti came to JMU with loads of experience. With stops at Pittsburgh, North Carolina State and Alabama — as well as head coaching jobs at Indiana University (PA) and Elon — Cignetti’s football mindset earned him the next step in his career. “[Cignetti] and his staff came in and for the older guys who were driven to finish on top, he didn’t have to instill a whole lot of discipline into us,” former offensive lineman Mac Patrick said. “We knew what was at stake. Coach Cignetti is great with letting his players be who they are … with all that’s going on today in this climate, they’re trying to be leaders in the community and Coach Cignetti does nothing but encourage his players to do that.”

In his debut spring season, the biggest question was who was going to be the starting quarterback. Ben DiNucci finished 2018 with questions regarding his consistency, but still carried a skill set that fit into offensive coordinator Shane Montgomery’s scheme. DiNucci beat out now redshirt senior quarterback Cole Johnson for the job, and the team’s shape began to form.

Cignetti wanted a hard-nose, downhill offense that relied on its run game to open the field for an aerial attack. With the addition of wide receiver Brandon Polk, an element of speed was added to the passing game. Wide receiver Riley Stapleton, tight end Dylan Stapleton, cornerback Rashad Robinson and safety D’Angelo Amos highlighted a veteran-laden team that wanted to return to Frisco as it did in 2016-17, even after a coaching change.

“All you could do was lean on your leaders,” Patrick said. “[The team had] a lot of guys with a lot of playing experience, life experience … You almost learn to roll with the punches.”

The Dukes’ first test was at West Virginia — Cignetti’s alma mater and the school his father coached at for four seasons. It was also DiNucci’s first opportunity to show his improvement and ability to lead the team as a top-ranked FCS team.

While West Virginia itself underwent a coaching change, it was able to fend off the Dukes, 20-13. Solomon Vanhorse scored JMU’s only touchdown and Ethan Ratke added two field goals, but it seemed like the offense didn’t show its true capabilities. The defense, however, made it clear it was going to be a force against every team on the schedule.

“I think everyone that went to that game knew that we had the chance to win,” former safety Adam Smith said. “I think we kind of blew a few assignments, blew a few plays, but I think that it was a very close game that showed that we could compete with everyone. We were all upset that we lost that one. We were going in and we expected to win.”

The next two games ended in blowout fashion, albeit against small programs.
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JMU blew out Saint Francis (PA) 44-7 and dominated Morgan State 63-12. DiNucci began to find his form as a field general, throwing six touchdowns in the two contests without turning the ball over.

A three-game road stretch that included the start of CAA play awaited JMU following the two wins. First was Chattanooga, which kept things close in the first quarter but couldn’t keep up as the game went on, eventually falling 37-14.

The next contest was big for a multitude of reasons. As JMU prepared to travel to Elon, it would be the first time Cignetti returned since departing and it was the Dukes’ first chance at revenge after the Phoenix upset JMU at Bridgeforth Stadium the year before. Elon scored on the second play from scrimmage to take a 7-0 lead, but the Dukes responded with 38 unanswered points en route to a 45-10 win. Next was No. 24 Stony Brook, which took JMU to the brink.

“You knew the test was going to be Elon because of the whole circumstances with Coach Cignetti and the whole nine yards,” Dave Thomas, host for ESPN Radio Harrisonburg, said. “When JMU came back and scored quickly … You felt that this team had the makings.”

The Dukes looked to spoil homecoming for the Seawolves, and when they were up 38-28 with less than 10 minutes remaining in the fourth it was easy to assume a victory for JMU as it would rely on its stout defense to close the deal. But that wasn’t the case: A quick touchdown and a 47-yard field goal leveled the score with five seconds left, pushing the game to overtime.

JMU got the ball first and scored via Jawon Hamilton’s three-yard run, and the defense stood tall and forced a turnover on downs — sealing another win for Cignetti’s team. It proved what the team needed to do for success. Hamilton finished with 105 rushing yards and two touchdowns and running back Percy Agyei-Osehe added two more scores and 96 yards on the ground. Cignetti and Montgomery’s vision of a run-based offense was becoming clear, and as the team rattled off wins week after week, the expectation of a national championship filled fans’ minds.

“[National title expectations] felt right after a while,” Smith said. “We started getting that uncontrollable feeling again. We knew we could beat just about anyone … It started high and it stayed high.”

In the next week, JMU needed a fourth quarter outburst to stifle No. 5 Villanova 38-24, and it followed with a 38-10 trouncing of William & Mary. With four games left in the 2019 season, the Dukes were 7-1 (4-0 CAA) and sitting at No. 2 in the country.

The Dukes handled each remaining regular season game, beating Towson 27-10, New Hampshire 54-16, Richmond 48-6 and Rhode Island 55-21. The defense was suffocating and the offense meshed well entering the playoffs, but the job wasn’t done yet in its bid to return to the heart of Texas.

After being picked as the second seed in the 2019 FCS Playoffs, it faced Monmouth in the second round following a first-round bye. Despite the Hawks keeping the Dukes within distance JMU once again broke away as the game progressed, winning 66-21.

The next two games would be “pre-tests” for the national championship. A stout Northern Iowa team visited Bridgeforth, but was shut out by the Dukes’ powerful defense and JMU won, 17-0. Then, Weber State came to town, looking to avenge its heartbreak ing loss in 2017.

The Wildcats wouldn’t achieve it. JMU flexed its muscles to a 30-14 win, punching a ticket to Frisco to face No. 1 North Dakota State. It was another chapter in the two teams’ rivalry and one that was set to be a showdown for the ages.

In less-than-ideal weather, JMU raced to a 7-0 lead after Riley Stapleton caught a five-yard pass from DiNucci. NDSU responded with two touchdowns to go up seven, but a 26-yard field goal from Ratke pulled the Dukes within four. Five minutes and fifty seconds later, another Bison touchdown made it 21-10 heading into halftime.

Ratke added his second field goal of the game in the midst of the third quarter, setting the game up for an intense finish. The game’s pivotal moment happened on the first play of the fourth quarter. Stuck at third and 23, NDSU quarterback Trey Lance danced through the line of scrimmage and burst for 44 yards to push the Bison lead to 28-13, serving a huge blow to the Dukes’ title hopes.

Not all hope was lost. With 6:55 remaining in the game, Stapleton reeled in his second touchdown of the game to give JMU a lifeline. After stopping Lance on fourth down with under three minutes remaining, the Dukes got the ball back and marched down the field.

With first and goal on the NDSU three-yard line with eight seconds left, JMU was a few feet away from being a two-point conversion from sending the game into overtime. The next play, DiNucci took the snap, rolled to his left and tried to find Polk in the corner of the end zone. Instead, the Bison’s James Hendricks stepped in front of the ball, intercepted it and broke the hearts of the JMU faithful across the country.

Despite the loss, the team made fans proud. Through adversity, the Dukes marched back to Frisco following a year absence and pushed the nation’s best team to the brink. It fell short, but JMU showed what it has become: an FCS giant that wants to consistently compete at the highest level.

“Seeing them get back to another championship was special,” Thomas said. “Seeing them take care of business in the CAA was special. I think seeing where the program has elevated to, when you have a coaching change … with Houston to Cignetti, I think it trended up again … I think fondly of watching his staff coach, how they coach and what they did with these players.”

Now, JMU waits for its chance to redeem itself amid the coronavirus pandemic. As the season is in limbo, the team waits for answers. The possibility of a spring season is met with the idea of waiting until fall 2021 to ensure safety, but until then, the Dukes will hold that feeling of heartbreak and use it as motivation. Because eventually, football will be back, and the future chapters of JMU football will be written.

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