



FROGs Benjamin Erwin ('07) and Regan Hiatt ('06) helped this year's freshmen dive into life on the JMU campus.

First impressions

JMU's FROGS leap into action to get freshmen off on the right foot

By Margaret Robertson ('05)

Photos by Erin Pettit ('05)

During the August 2004 Orientation University Welcome, JMU President Linwood H. Rose told the freshmen class, "It is my privilege to welcome you as a member of the JMU community. You get to do something that not everyone has a chance to do. You get to start life anew. You have a new location, new teachers and new friends. Make the most of it. You're all 'A' students today. ... I want to recognize the "FROGS" that have helped you during your first few days on campus. They are the best amphibians I know."

JMU's FROGS are a group of student volunteers, also known as the First-year Orientation GuideS. The Madison FROGS are supervised by upperclass Orientation Program Assistants, who assist Steve Grande, director of JMU's 1787 Orientation and First Year Program. Grande, the FROGS and OPAs provide freshmen with the guidance they need to pursue the best Madison Experience they can.

"Along with the FROGS and Orientation Program Assistants, I encourage you to get involved," Rose also told freshmen at Orientation. "Begin your college experience with integrity. I hope you try lots of opportunities and I hope you focus on leadership in one or two. Leave a legacy of leadership on this university. Seek out others that are not like you. Educators talk about the importance of diversity all the time. That exposure allows us to open our minds. That examination is important.

"Now I want you to recite my *Presidential Pledge*: 'In addition to going to all of my classes, I will go to at least one performance, one game, one lecture, and I will attend with someone that I didn't know previously.' Have a great first year," he said.

As the FROGS and OPAs volunteer, they exemplify the friendly atmosphere of JMU. Willing to aid freshmen and transfer students in any area of confusion or frustration, the FROGS and OPAs envelope new JMU students with care and genuine concern. New students are amazed by the kindness of the orientation staff. "Students, faculty and staff have worked collaboratively to build a program that introduces students to the Madison community in a way that reflects the unique spirit of JMU," says Grande, the director of JMU's orientation programs.

FROG Benjamin Erwin ('07) says, "When you come to JMU, you don't feel like a number. You get a sense of family. My FROG, Angela Cangemi, was great, and I decided that I wanted to be one. It's great to see smiles on the students' faces and the reassurance of parents."

FROG Regan Hiatt ('06) concurs, "It's nice to know that you can make a difference in a student's first days at college."

Grande's 1787 Orientation Program derives its name from the transitional event in 1787 when James Madison and his comrades wrote the constitution of the United States. 1787 August Orientation is a metaphor marking the month of August as a season of "tremendous transitions" for new JMU students.

In 1999, Steve Grande became the director of the 1787 Orientation. That year exactly 100 people applied for the 100 FROG and OPA positions available. In recent years the FROG applications received have far exceeded the number of positions available. Since 1999, an additional 120 positions have become available for prospective FROGS. This year, 560 people applied for the 220 volunteer positions. The OPAs supervise the FROGS before, during and after 1787 August Orientation. As FROGS train under OPA supervision, they can apply for one of the 24 positions available to OPAs in the fall.

Before the scheduled orientation events begin, FROGS and OPAs begin the day early. Preparing for the hundreds of students expected on campus, the staff plows through eventful days with cheer and energy. "It's up to us to get them excited about being here," says Hiatt. The FROGS and OPAs successfully completed their task because Grande comments that the "enthusiasm of this year's freshman class has consistently impressed" him. This year's class experienced the new adventure of the Centennial Challenge. Since this class will graduate when JMU turns 100 years old, Grande and his staff designed a scavenger hunt to help freshmen explore and familiarize themselves with the campus. "On the hottest day of the year 2000 freshman energetically threw themselves into a crazy scavenger hunt to learn more about the people, ideas and values of JMU," says Grande. The hunt allowed them to travel around on the Harrisonburg Transit Bus System to successfully locate their destination.

Encouraging new students to become involved in JMU life, the orientation staff builds relationships with their designated "tadpoles." Regan Hiatt explains the ratio of FROGS to "tadpoles" (freshmen) is "two FROGS to 30 freshmen." "My FROG, Angela Cangemi, was great and I wanted to be one," says Benjamin Erwin. This year, Erwin learned that he was selected to become one of the 220

FROGS that help organize 1787 Orientation for next year.

Sacrificing sleep, the orientation staff is up at 7 a.m. in the summertime to help freshmen move into residence halls and to make their experience pleasant and informative. "By listening to the voices of students and faculty we have created something pretty remarkable," says Grande. Their smiles, enthusiasm and "energy was contagious," Grande says. "They have a great willingness to serve others."

Without a doubt, the FROGS and OPAs positively influence those they encounter making a lasting impression on the students. Kirsty Yetter ('06) sums it up, "I love JMU so much and being a FROG is one way that I can express my love of this school."