

Public issues deserve public funding

JMU determined to uphold students despite disinvestment

As I prepare this letter for *Madison*, the Virginia General Assembly has determined the Commonwealth of Virginia's appropriations for the next biennium and awaits action by the governor. Higher education has not fared well in the last few state budgets. We are experiencing a significant shift in the distribution of costs for higher education from the state to students and their families as universities are forced to rely upon tuition to maintain sufficient levels of funding.

James Madison University will endure a net reduction of \$24 million — nearly 30 percent — in state funding when in 2011–12 our General Fund appropriation falls to \$54 million. For just last year, our General Fund appropriation was \$78 million. On an individual student basis, this equates to a decrease in support from \$6,180 per in-state, full-time-enrolled student to \$3,960 per in-state FTE student.

While the current economic turbulence is partly to blame, this slide in funding goes deeper. To illustrate what I mean, consider that Virginia ranks 40th in state support for higher education and rock bottom in the Southeast. And yet, Virginia is the seventh-wealthiest state in the nation.

The irony does not end there. This downward spiral in support for higher education is happening in the home of Madison, Jefferson and Washington, themselves educated and enlightened citizens who believed that sustaining the republic hinges on education.

I doubt these native sons would appreciate what appears to be a change in attitude toward education in Virginia. I fear that our state government no longer views higher education as a public good, but rather as a commodity that should be borne by the individuals who pursue it.

During the first two years of these budget cuts, we were able to reduce the impact on tuition by increasing it by less than any of our peer public institutions in the state. However, JMU can no longer afford to handle such reversions in funding adequacy.

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Earlier this month, the JMU Board of Visitors approved making up the bulk of our loss through a 6.4 percent increase in tuition, comprehensive fees, and room and board amounting to \$930 per in-state student.

We are determined not to sacrifice quality and have elected to keep our incoming freshman class frozen at 3,960 students for the second year in a row. Paradoxically, however, the demand on JMU to expand enrollment and ultimately produce more graduates has never



JMU President Linwood H. Rose is congratulated by Phi Beta Kappa Society National Secretary John Churchill. JMU joined fewer than 300 U.S. Phi Beta Kappa chapters.

been greater; yet we cannot afford to grow and still preserve our quality.

Nor will we lower our standards of performance. Our professors and students continue to show that at James Madison University we remain committed to excellence. This semester, for example, counseling psychology professor Lennis G. Echterling and justice studies professor J. Peter Pham received the 2010 Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and Dominion Resources. David Brakke, dean of the College of Science and Mathematics, was named a fellow of the National Association for the Advancement of Science.

I found it especially meaningful to watch our first 136 students inducted

into Xi Virginia Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa this semester.

While I encourage you to read about these and other stellar achievements on the JMU Web site and in this and future issues of *Madison*, I tell you about them to underscore just how high our students, professors and alumni aim and what the stakes are when it comes to higher education.

Academic achievement, we know, leads to further benefits. I have often said that JMU's approach to education entails our professors and students addressing societal issues through teaching, research, service and strategic partnerships, both on and off campus. We produce graduates who tackle these issues in their careers and through community service. Public issues deserve public funding.

Furthermore, our society must embrace a publicly funded system for higher learning as a catalyst for growth and economic development. We must take responsibility for our future by imparting knowledge to our youth.

Education is not just an intangible good. Public investment in higher education yields measurable improvements and sparks economic activity. In fact, the Weldon Cooper Center of the University of Virginia recently published an economic impact study of higher education on the commonwealth. The study found that for every dollar invested in higher education, there is a return on investment of \$1.39 in state tax revenue. It is difficult to imagine another investment of public dollars that produces an annual rate of return of close to 40 percent. In addition, college and university expenditures were shown to add another \$13.31 to Virginia's gross domestic product for every dollar expended.

I urge Madison alumni, parents and students to be ambassadors for public higher education in Virginia. Please talk about the benefits and the stakes to your neighbors and legislators.

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