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— CHARLES H. "CHIP" ROSENBERG JR. ('81)

stopped along the way to hear about the academic buildings, the residence halls, and other significant points of interest, like Kissing Rock, the Quad and Newman Lake. I couldn't believe how much had changed, but I enjoyed seeing how much remained the same in the Blue-stone area of campus. I was so impressed with the campus that I lived on 30 years ago. Even though the campus has tripled in size since I was a student, it really felt the same. The culture, the experience, the "feel" is hard to describe. It's an esprit de corps that resides in the DNA of the institution — the Madison Experience.

What I found most striking was the vast difference between the young high school kids on the tour and the JMU Student Ambassadors who led us across campus. The difference in years was only three or four, but the difference in maturity was enormous. Most of the high-school kids were sharp enough, but it demonstrated to my wife and I what happens in just a few years in college, especially at a place like JMU. Our Ambassador, a young lady from Richmond, was articulate, funny and clearly enjoyed showing off her university. During the tour, I shared that I was a JMU graduate, and she begged me for stories from back in the day! She couldn't believe it when I told her that everyone used to sit on the

hill behind the student union (Warren Hall) behind Hillcrest. She immediately decided that was an awesome place to sit and wondered why it stopped.

I felt compelled to share our wonderful day visiting JMU, and how proud I am to share the Madison Experience with my wife and daughter. The visit exceeded my expectations and a large part of that is due to an outstanding Student Ambassador. She did an excellent job showing us the campus in a positive way. I looked at the faces of the parents during the tour and I could tell they were thinking "I would have no problem with my child attending this school."

It's often hard to get a 14 year old to be impressed with anything; but after a chili dog at Jess' Quick Lunch, we headed up I-81 toward home. I turned around and asked my daughter what she thought of my alma mater. She thought for a second and replied, "Pretty cool, Dad. I could definitely see myself going to JMU."

CHARLES H. "CHIP"
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Share your letters and feedback with *Madison* by emailing them to madisonmag@jmu.edu; or write to *Madison*, JMU, 725 South Mason Street, MSC 3610, Harrisonburg, VA 22807.

{Guest Editor's Note}

Distinguishing academic quality

What truly distinguishes the best colleges is their emphasis on substantive intellectual inquiry. The superb quality of JMU's academic program is a much better kept secret than the renown we have earned for our welcoming and supportive atmosphere. As associate dean of the College of Arts and Letters, I observe both every day. It serves to



remind ourselves — our faculty, students and alumni — how good we really are.

At JMU, students learn by doing. Over the years, our undergraduates have established a national reputation for outstanding

research, presenting their findings at local, regional, national and international professional conferences. Their research begins in classes, where students are carefully mentored by engaged and well-credentialed faculty members.

JMU also hosts one of the largest student conferences on the East Coast. During 2011 Mad-RUSH (Madison Research by Undergraduates in the Social Sciences and Humanities), students presented their research following the same professional methodologies as keynote presenter Matthew Wasniewski ('91, '94M), historian of the United States House of Representatives. Student presenters were exhilarated to discover that they were indeed experts on their chosen topics. Professors thought their papers compared favorably with those presented at top professional conferences.

Student essays illuminate the spirit of curiosity, inquiry, creativity and hard work that characterize undergraduate research at JMU across all the disciplines. They demonstrate outstanding skills in critical thinking, writing and oral communication. Some wags may argue that few graduates will spend hours discussing Milton, the nature of good or the causes of the French Revolution around the water cooler. However, the skills and knowledge our researchers accrue enable them to identify and grapple effectively with the complexities of the big questions that face each generation. Intellectual dexterity like this is invaluable throughout life.

— J. CHRIS ARNDT, *associate dean*
College of Arts and Letters

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