

Huber Learning Community • Madison Eco Learning Community  
Madison International • Psychology Learning Community • Roop Learning Community  
Trelawney Learning Community • Visual and Performing Arts Community

# Learning where you live

**BY PAULA POLGLASE ('92,'96M)**

Residential Learning  
Communities connect  
JMU students and professors  
with similar interests



**BIOLOGY BUDS**

**I**magine if your walk to class didn't involve a sprint across campus but was down-stairs in your residence hall. Imagine taking a field trip with your hall mates, hiking with your professor, learning how to teach the physics of roller coasters or learning how to say "good morning" in Chinese from your roommate.



**HONORS PIZZA PARTY**



**STUDY TIME**



**RAINY LONDON**



**PRACTICE TIME**



**FLORENCE SKYLINE**

JMU freshmen don't have to imagine these types of Madison Experiences. First-year students at JMU have the unique option of participating in a Residential Learning Community. Learning communities offer students the benefit of connecting with a small group of students and professors with similar interests. JMU learning communities focus on different themes but offer many similar opportunities. A faculty coordinator organizes each learning community and students take a joint class related to the academic focus of the learning community.

"Learning communities create an automatic niche for students with similar academic interests," says Kathleen Campbell, associate director in the Office of Residence Life. She adds, "Students who participate in a JMU Residential Learning Community are very positive about their experiences."

Eight JMU learning communities include experiences for pre-professional health students, students interested in other cultures, psychology majors, education majors, biology majors, students majoring in the visual and performing arts, and Honors Program students.

Beyond the shared classes, students participate in field trips, community activities and unique academic experiences. Last year, learning community residents shared trips to the Baltimore Aquarium, the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., and Kings Dominion. They also sponsored community dinners, themed parties and completed volunteer projects for Harrisonburg and Rockingham County agencies.

Courtney Waldmann ('13), an interdisciplinary liberal education major from Eastchester, N.Y., lived in the Roop Learning Community for education majors during her freshman year and stayed involved as a sophomore. She says she met some of her best friends through the Roop Learning Community. "Roop

has a Big/Little component," says Waldmann. "Freshmen are paired with sophomores to help ease their transition to college. I truly loved being a 'Little' and a 'Big' community member."

Faculty involvement is at the heart of JMU's residential learning communities. Each faculty coordinator plans out the academic and programmatic experience for students. Campbell has been impressed with the professors who get involved as learning coordinators. "These faculty members are passionate. They are particularly concerned with this group of students and their academic successes."

Waldmann says, "I have the best relationship with Roop faculty coordinator Dr. Cindy Klevickis. She is a wonderful teacher and always encourages us to pursue our goals. I



Cindy Klevickis directs the Roop Learning Community for students interested in teaching Pre-K through 12, and Oris Griffin is a professor-in-residence. (Below): Professor of psychology Kenn Barron directs the JMU Psychology Learning Community.



Honors Program Director Barry Falk and his staff have worked hard to develop the Honors Program outside of the classroom, creating a built-in sense of community that shapes honors students' Madison Experience.

For most first-year honors students a built-in sense of community starts where they live, in the Honors Living and Learning Center housed in Shenandoah Hall. This community brings together 200 first-year honors students from all majors to create an intellectual culture within the Honors Program.

"I was constantly surrounded by people who were just like me, in that they worked very hard for classes," says biology major Seana Sears ('13) of Round Hill, Va. "Living with all of these amazing, intelligent people made my transition from high school to college that much better."

Incoming freshmen who have been admitted to the JMU Honors Program are expected, but not required, to live in the honors residence hall. Although all honors students do not take a shared class, there is a faculty-in-residence



Honors Program Director Barry Falk (front row, far right) takes a photo opportunity with students in JMU's 2008 Oxford study group while in England.

know I can always turn to her if I need help with anything."

in Shenandoah Hall and additional programming focused on intellectual engagement.

Great success with the honors hall has sparked high retention rates in the Honors Program and led to the expansion of the program within Shenandoah Hall. "We've occupied half of another wing and hope to grow more," says Falk. ■

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In addition to the Honors Living and Learning Center, JMU offers first-year students the option of applying to live in one of seven

## Residential Learning Communities:

### Huber Learning Community

Twenty pre-professional health students are accepted each year to the Huber Learning Community. Students who are interested in preparing for a professional health career share a seminar class in both the fall and spring semester that addresses local and global health challenges and how they relate to a variety of health professions.

### Madison Eco Learning Community

First-year students who want to explore environmental issues and learn how to live more a more sustainable life live in Wayland Hall, designed to be the first Platinum LEED certified residence hall renovation in the country. Students share several classes, develop outdoor skills through recreational activities, and participate in community projects and field trips.

### Madison International

Madison International is a diverse cohort of international and American students who are interested in learning about world cultures, beliefs and practices from each other. Students participate in a seminar class each semester as well as various programs and activities that give them a diverse international experience right in the center of campus.

### Psychology Learning Community

Students with a strong interest in psychology get a unique two-semester introduction to the field through tailor-made courses and experiences to help jump-start their major studies. Students participate in advanced course work, research and practical experiences as well as secure early admission to the major.

### Roop Learning Community

Students interested in a teaching career take their core science classes together. Education-related community service and field trips to local and regional museums, parks and schools round out the experience.

### Trelawney Learning Community

Biology majors and students interested in research get a jump-start in the field through their participation in Trelawney. In addition to seminar classes exploring topics in biological sciences, each student is paired with a faculty member to conduct hands-on research during freshman year.

### Visual and Performing Arts Community

The Visual and Performing Arts Learning Community is housed in Wayland Hall, newly renovated to accommodate performance, practice and studio space for students interested in the arts. This community focuses on the artist as citizen leader and on identifying the creative and interdisciplinary connections between the arts and campus.

Three members of the Madison Eco Learning community enjoy the natural beauty of campus. Left to right are Lindsay Holt ('14), Liz Coates ('14) and Sam Frere ('14).

