

DIRECTIONS

A Madison community, so genuinely aligned

As you might imagine, in the final year of my presidency of James Madison University, I have allowed my observations of the Madison community to become a bit personal and even philosophical.

At every turn, I am impressed by the people of this university and how singular of belief and purpose they are when it comes to educating our students. As a devoted student of organizational leadership, I can say how rare it is for such a large group of people to be so genuinely aligned.

We have been persistent in making our mission statement well known. However, it is difficult to discern whether it drives our culture of education or describes our culture of education or both. Thirteen years ago, a committee of faculty and staff members, alumni, and community and business leaders deliberated over every syllable and nuance of these 20 words: *We are a community committed to preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives.*

JMU faculty and staff believe truly and deeply in these ideals and that delivering on them requires academic programs and experiences of real-world relevance for our students. Our professors routinely translate those scholarly ideals into tangibly relevant learning for students in the classroom, group projects, undergraduate research, internships, service-learning, mentoring relationships with alumni and more.

At the controls of Bloomberg machines in the College of Business' Gaglioti Capital Markets Lab, for instance, our students monitor and react to the same worldwide financial news that drives Wall Street traders and other investors. Our students tune into financial data as the Dow and the NASDAQ rise and fall (and rise again, we hope) throughout the day on Wall Street. They use this data to inform their research for class, investment competitions and more. A leadership gift from a generous alumnus provided 12 Bloomberg terminals, which are the equipment of choice of major financial organizations. His philanthropic gesture highlights a strong commitment to current students — shared by many alumni, who this year celebrate 100 years of Madison heritage.

While our stateside finance students gauge the effects on the U.S. stock markets of, so recently, Greek and Italian debt, austerity plans and newly formed governments, a group of JMU master's students headquartered in Florence, Italy, has marked JMU's fifth year of graduate study focused on the European Union. Our scholars are conducting their study in the midst of the intense economic, political and social pressures at work as the EU, its member nations and their citizens negotiate their interests in this volatile time.



JMU QEP: *Enlightened Citizens, Ethical Lives* highlights what is so right about Madison. This major initiative is designed to increase student learning related to civic knowledge and engagement, both local and global.

Experiences such as these highlight the catalytic effect of JMU's growing international focus on the university's mission. Over the last three decades, the Office of International Programs has led the fundamental shift in JMU's educational emphasis that an interdependent and technologically connected world requires today. Last year more than 1,100 JMU students studied in 56 destinations around the world, including semester programs in Antwerp, Beijing, Florence, Kenya, London and Salamanca, graduate programs in Florence and Malta, and more than 40 short-term and exchange programs. Our students

have studied art and literature in cosmopolitan environments and anthropology and wildlife preservation in remote villages.

These varied experiences have made our students more sensitive to the nuanced implications and human circumstances of world events. Moreover, they highlight a global dimension of our mission statement. In this day and age, we can no longer think exclusively of educated and enlightened American citizens and their role in American culture. Increasing numbers of JMU students from nations like China, India, Korea, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam help us consider our role as citizens of the world and illumine the diverse meanings, opportunities and obligations of citizenship.

The JMU Quality Enhancement Plan: Enlightened Citizens, Ethical Lives, a major initiative now under way, couldn't encompass JMU's ideals more naturally. The QEP is designed to increase student learning related to civic knowledge and engagement, both local and global; environmental stewardship; ethical reasoning and responsible decision making; multicultural competencies; and personal, fiscal, professional and social responsibility.

Although a QEP is required as part of reaffirming our reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools — Commission On Colleges, the topic is all our own. It was chosen from among 76 proposals from the JMU community and winnowed down to five, two of which were then combined into one potent socially and educationally relevant initiative.

That two civic-minded proposals can bubble up as individual efforts at JMU, a committee combine them into one powerful initiative, our campus then embrace and implement it, and our students — and society — ultimately benefit from it is a phenomenon that highlights what is so right about Madison: our community's belief in its ability to make the world a better place by educating students.

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