

{Alumni Association}

Do you have JMU LOVE?

Alumni relations office establishes key alumni engagement program

BY JAMES IRWIN ('06)

For Kevin Gibson ('05), the breakthrough idea started in 2009 with a simple observation: involvement is at the heart of the Madison Experience.

JMU students are proof of the university mission to build committed graduates. Clubs and organizations have grown so rapidly that Student Organization Night, which originated on the patio outside of Warren Hall, today is held on the UREC turf fields and showcases more than 300 organizations.

So Gibson, then a newly hired assistant director in JMU's Office of Alumni Relations, began working on a project to extend that culture of involvement to JMU alumni — searching for a way to keep the Madison Experience going beyond graduation.

Three years later, JMU LOVE — JMU Leaders of Volunteer Engagement — was born.

JMU LOVE is a movement to build Madison involvement by providing an easily accessible online forum for the university's largest constituency, says Gibson, now associate director in the alumni office. The program provides opportunities for JMU alumni to connect with students, each other, and their alma mater.

"One analogy that sticks with me is that as a student, JMU is the neighborhood and your JMU organization is your home," explains Alan Maynard ('06), assistant director of alumni relations and JMU LOVE program director. "We want to bring that home back to you. In that regard, JMU LOVE is basically a virtual student organization night."

Ten host offices on campus — ranging from Career and Academic Planning to Study Abroad — currently make up JMU LOVE, acting as a network with a common need for volunteers to staff events and programs. Jon McNamara ('05), Richmond Chapter president for the JMU Duke Club, volunteers with JMU's Office of Parent Relations at summer sendoff events, helping students and families of incoming freshmen transition into life at JMU.

"JMU LOVE offers a meaningful opportunity to engage with the next generation of Dukes," McNamara says. "It provides a perfect opportunity to share what made JMU special for me while allowing me to remain engaged in a way outside of traditional avenues."

Beyond the immediate benefit of volunteerism, JMU LOVE

creates a way for graduates to learn how they can help shape the future of their alma mater. Carol Benassi ('82), Dallas Chapter president for the JMU Alumni Association, says when she graduated, such a mechanism didn't exist, nor did the realization among graduates that alumni involvement was critical to university success.

"By creating a community of alumni volunteers, JMU LOVE gives people an open door to learn what the university needs and why it is needed," Benassi says. "Dr. Rose joked there's always a crane on campus. We see buildings go up and we don't

realize there's a need for giving and volunteerism. I bet a lot of people don't know they can contribute. They don't know that a donation matters, or that volunteering at an event matters. But it does."

Launched in September of 2011, JMU LOVE amassed 263 volunteers for 472 opportunities in its first 10 months and received a regional Mark of Excellence award from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, District III. Future plans are to expand volunteer opportunities into Madison classrooms by partnering with academic departments. Still, as Maynard notes, the program's potential is almost hard to predict — its growth driven by the very audience it was created for.

"JMU LOVE is an important rung in the ladder of volunteer engagement," Maynard adds. "I think it's a funnel, and it has huge implications for the future — not just involvement, but giving back to the university in many different ways."



Jonathan McNamara ('05) (center) participates in JMU LOVE at summer send-off events hosted by the Office of Parent Relations. The Richmond Chapter president of the JMU Duke Club uses the events as opportunities to inform incoming freshmen about clubs and organizations they can be part of once they arrive on campus.

JMU LOVE



* Learn more about JMU LOVE and sign up for a volunteer opportunity at www.jmulove.com. Or contact the Office of Alumni Relations at 888-JMU-ALUM.