

{Alumni Chapters}

Rising to the challenge

Alumni chapters face off for bragging rights BY JAMES IRWIN ('06)

Chapter Challenge: It's based on a form of grassroots philanthropy, sort of like political candidates who raise money through satellite headquarters. These grassroots efforts go by a number of titles: crowd funding, peer-to-peer, the ground game.

It is a major way to raise funds and awareness for a cause.

And it's arrived at a JMU alumni chapter near you in a program called the JMU Alumni Chapter Challenge. Its premise is simple: Pool JMU alumni, volunteers and advocates in 20 regions worldwide into a single campaign that raises money for the university (any gift, of any amount, to any fund counts). An alum's donation is tracked based on place of residence and counts toward the chapter nearest that location. For example, a JMU graduate living in Midlothian, Va., counts as a member of the Richmond Chapter.

From July 1, 2013, until May 31, 2014, JMU alumni worldwide will represent their chapters by making gifts to the university. There are both prizes — and bragging rights — on the line.

"We've never really done something like this on a national level," says Amanda Leech ('09), assistant director of alumni chapters in the JMU Office of Alumni Relations. "It's a natural fit that our alumni leaders would be promoting to local alumni groups. They already are trusted providers of information to alumni in their communities."

The goal, Leech says, is to raise funds for JMU, awareness of philanthropic needs in higher education, and to increase JMU's alumni giving participation. In 2012–13, 8,508 JMU alumni made a donation to Madison — the highest total in the history of the university. A unique element of the Chapter Challenge is there are no target

funds. Donors choose their JMU program to support. There are more than 2,000 fund destinations to select from, and the freedom to choose where the money goes is something that resonates with alumni, says Kristen Malzone ('07), president of the New York/New Jersey Alumni Chapter. Malzone has been using chapter events as a platform to communicate about the Chapter Challenge, as well as raffling off items to donors and playing up the idea of competition.

"Having an opportunity for a donor to select where their money goes has been something I've mentioned whenever I've talked about [the Chapter Challenge]," she says. "And, of course, New Yorkers are pretty competitive."

They are competitive in Richmond, too. Last year, the chapter had one of the highest alumni giving percentages in the country (10.9 percent).

"The bottom line is to raise money for the university, get more people involved and to

create a better understanding of why it's important to give back," explains Allison Smith ('08), giving chair for the Richmond Alumni Chapter. "There's a real buzz around the competition this creates. And designating where the money goes really resonates with people. It makes their gift unique, knowing it goes back to something they really care about."

Ultimately, Smith adds, the Chapter Challenge is designed to help private donations become a major fund source for the university. These gifts benefit scholarships, programs and financial aid. "JMU can't meet its financial needs on tuition alone," Smith says. "Alumni want to give back. And when you give back, it helps the university."

'There's a real buzz around the competition this creates. And designating where the money goes really resonates with people. It makes their gift unique, knowing it goes back to something they really care about.'

— ALLISON SMITH ('08)



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Alumni within a 30-mile radius of the 22 participating chapters are included in the Chapter Challenge (that's more than 76,500 JMU alumni!).

How can YOU participate? Simple:

- Check out the JMU Alumni Chapter Challenge online at www.jmu.edu/chapterchallenge
- Make a gift to JMU by choosing a fund at www.jmu.edu/give
- Check out the monthly standings at www.jmu.edu/alumni/involved/ccstandings.shtml
- Tweet about the JMU Alumni Chapter Challenge #JMUAlumniChapterChallenge

→ www.jmu.edu/chapterchallenge